HeroQuest

THE SCREAMING SPECTRE

DAVE MORRIS

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Osric pointed into the water. 'Master, he is coming! See, rising up from the ocean bed . . . ?'

'You all know the incantations,' said Magnus abruptly. 'Join me in them now.'

Hesitantly the three apprentices sang the chant while the Archimage wove the spell:

Great spirit of the whale road,
Come, we summon thee.
Awaken from your bed of sand,
And rise from out the sea.

The wind dropped suddenly. Drizzle hung like a pall in the dank air. The watery groan was joined by a deeper sound: the protesting crack of distant thunder high in the heavens. The sky darkened and flickering lightning could be dimly seen behind the leaden clouds. Rain lashed down hard out of the sky, making the sea seem to boil.

Then, with a sonorous piping sound, a great black shape broke the surface and rose, towering like a reef beside their tiny boat . . .

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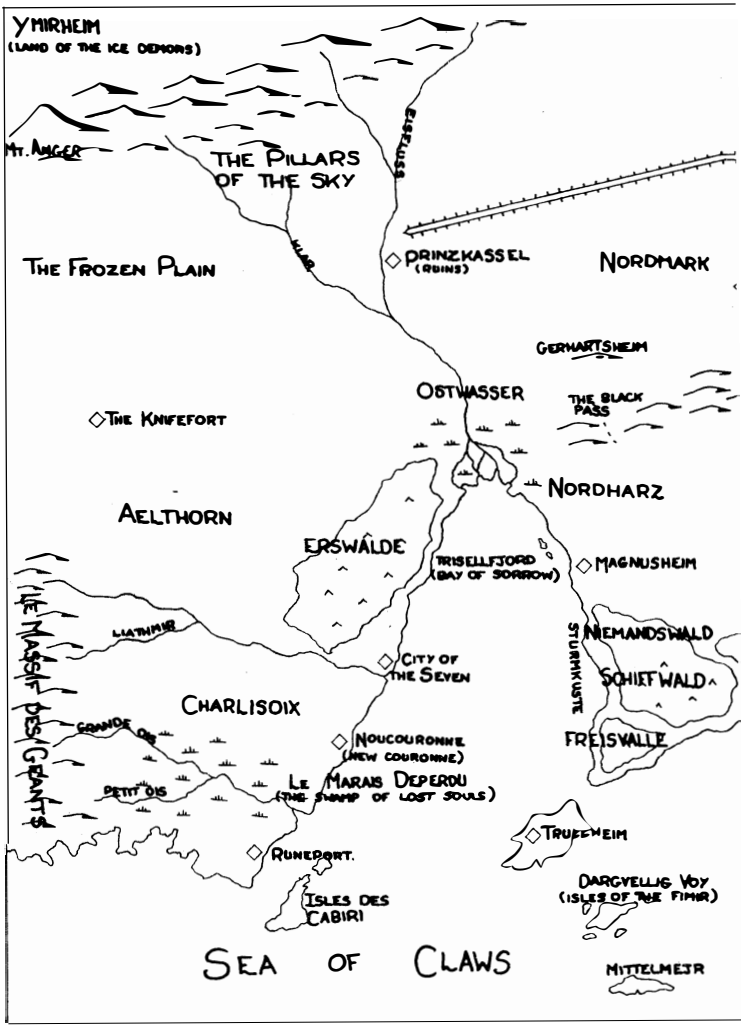

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HEROQUEST: THE SCREAMING SPECTRE

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THE SCREAMING SPECTRE

CHAPTER ONE

The Archimage Magnus was one of the mightiest sorcerers of his era. By virtue of his rank he commanded the grimoire, or spell-book, of one of the great Colleges of magic. The arcane lore contained within its pages gave Magnus access to spells of unequalled power.

But now he was weak as a kitten, needing the help of his three apprentices to stand at all.

Mercutio, the Archimage's manservant, was aghast at the sight of his master waxen-faced and swooning. 'What has happened?' he gasped.

It fell to the eldest apprentice, Baskaino, to explain. 'We were out walking on the cliffs. The Archimage was stung by a large red bee.'

'He complained of dizziness,' put in Kashor the

notary's son, as he pushed the manse doors shut against the wind that was now blowing in off the sea. 'We left him resting under a tree, but when we came back he was like this – feverish.'

Mercutio placed his master in bed and brought him broth, but the fever persisted. The apprentices decided to keep a vigil at the bedside during the night and Baskaino administered a potion to keep the Archimage's sleep free of vexatious dreams.

The potion was ineffective. In the early hours of the morning, the Archimage began to moan in his sleep. Hurrying to his side, the apprentices heard him muttering the name Balthazar.

'Who is this Balthazar?' wondered Osric, a sturdy youth of peasant stock whose aptitude for prediction had earned him his apprenticeship. He ran a hand through his tousled corn-gold hair and looked down at the Archimage, worry clouding his grey eyes.

'An enemy, possibly?' suggested Kashor, a small slim fellow brimming with nervous energy.

Baskaino, leaning over to mop the Archimage's brow, cast them a sidelong glance but kept disdainfully silent. Of the three, he presented the appearance of greatest composure. But after all, Baskaino was of noble birth and had the easy air of one accustomed to privilege.

The servant Mercutio came over to the bed, bearing a tray with goblets for them all. Baskaino took one of the goblets, dipped his fingers into it, and moistened the Archimage's lips. The spiced wine had

no perceptible effect. Again the Archimage groaned, and then he spoke: 'Balthazar! The mast has split! Balthazar!'

'Balthazar was the Archimage's own mentor,' said Mercutio in his wheezing voice. 'The original master of this manse. I served him then, just as I serve Archimage Magnus now.'

The Archimage had fallen quiet again. Kashor took one of the goblets and sipped at it. 'And what happened to him?' he asked Mercutio. Like all of them, he had sensed that a tale lay behind the old servant's words.

'Lost at sea, Master Kashor,' said Mercutio. 'He and Archimage Magnus were travelling back from Runeport. A storm blew up without warning and the ship capsized. It was a good many years ago.'

'How did the Archimage survive?' asked Osric.

Mercutio shrugged. 'Who knows? By magic, perhaps – or because he was a strong swimmer. Remember that this happened when he was a good deal younger than he is now.'

The remark brought a faint smile to their lips. The Archimage was not a young man, it was true, but he was barely into middle-age and (his current fever aside) he was robust and vigorous. Mercutio, by contrast, gave the impression of being shrivelled and brown with extreme antiquity – like an old item of furniture that has not been properly cared for. Kashor had once joked to the others that the old

servant moved so slowly that it was a wonder he didn't gather dust.

'Why don't you rest a while, young masters?' said Mercutio. 'I'll keep an eye on the Archimage.'

As they filed out of the chamber, the three apprentices glanced back to see Mercutio sitting on the edge of the bed, pale and thin as a ghost in the candlelight, gently mopping the sweat from his master's forehead.

'He'll probably still be here when one of us *is* the Archimage,' whispered Osric.

'Hush!' cautioned Baskaino sharply. 'You could bring bad luck on the master by speaking of such things.'

Kashor looked puzzled at this, but Osric nodded. After Baskaino had gone into his own chamber, the younger apprentices walked on along the landing and Kashor asked what he had meant.

'I should not have referred to a time when the Archimage would not be with us,' explained Osric. 'It is ill-omened to speak of mortality when someone lies in a fever. In the country they would say talk like that attracts the evil spirits.'

'The evil spirits!' said Kashor with a laugh. 'To think of all this fuss over a bee sting. I expect the Archimage will be fine by the morning.'

Osric nodded. They had come to the door of his own room. 'I hope so,' he said. He lit the lamp in his room and handed the candle to Kashor. 'Well, good night.'

'Good night, Osric,' said Kashor.

The pre-dawn trickled a gloomy grey light between the shutters. Mercutio hobbled over and opened them, to gaze out over the steel grey expanse of the ocean. Daylight sat wanly on the scene, a tint of silver over charcoal. The sea heaved slowly, waves lifting as though the water were the flanks of a giant beast as it drew in its ponderous breath.

'Mercutio . . .'

The old servant turned. The Archimage had risen on one elbow, the effort drawing lines of pain on his pallid face. 'Master,' Mercutio said urgently, 'do not exert yourself.'

'Listen to me, Mercutio,' said the Archimage. 'I have had a dream – and one, it seemed to me, full of portent. I must tell it to you.'

Mercutio came back to the bedside. 'Shall I fetch the apprentices, master?'

The Archimage shook his head, falling back on to the pillow with a sigh. 'No, the details might elude me by the time they arrived. Dreams are so insubstantial, Mercutio . . . especially those dredged up from the boundary of reality. I feel this to have been such a dream.'

Mercutio sat, arranging the coverlet as he spoke. 'Then, master, tell me – if my poor counsel is worth having.'

'Worth more than any, dear faithful Mercutio. Listen, then. I was aboard a ship, the *Harbinger*. It

was the last journey I took with Balthazar. A storm rolled over the sky, eclipsing the heavens. In my dream it was like the rage of a titan. The ship was a child's toy made of twigs, we were helpless dolls in the fury of the elements . . .'

The Archimage paused and gave a puff of wry laughter.

'Master?' said Mercutio.

'I was thinking, Mercutio,' said the Archimage. 'I am considered a master of elemental sorcery. Other wizards envy my power. But I was powerless that day, aghast and impotent when I beheld the true sight of nature unbound!'

'It was a dream, master,' Mercutio reminded him. 'Doubtless it seemed more terrible than it was in reality.'

Magnus shook his head. 'No. I remember it indelibly, that storm. It was every bit as awful as I recalled it in the dream. The mast cracked, the timbers opened. The ship broke apart from under us, leaving us in a void of storm and sea. I clung to the figurehead – it was a stout spar of wood, but it had been shorn like kindling. The water froze my bones . . .' His eyes closed, memories of agony contorting his face.

'And Balthazar, master?' asked Mercutio in a hushed voice.

The Archimage's eyes remained closed, but now he began to tremble violently and turn his head this way and that, as though witnessing a scene on the

backs of his eyelids. 'Yes, he's there – his cloak snagged on a floating timber. Balthazar! Balthazar! He cannot hear me . . . seems so still. I'm swimming to his side. Gods, the cold stings me like a nest of phantom hornets! Balthazar! He looks so lifeless as I reach for him, his face dipped into this icy brine. His beard is like seaweed. I turn him over and—'

The Archimage's scream tore through the passages of the manse: *'No!'*

'Oh, master!' cried Mercutio anxiously, shaking him. 'Please . . .'

The Archimage's eyelids fluttered open. He gave a gasp as he struggled awake again. 'I saw his face, Mercutio, in my dream. That was the one detail that was different. In reality, his body was never found.'

'I know, master.'

Mercutio placed his hand over his master's, a gesture of reassurance. Magnus shook it away. He seemed not to have registered the old servant's remark. 'After that, I clung to the figurehead for hours, staring into its blind painted eyes. What tears I shed for Balthazar were washed away by the sea, and I had the horror of my own predicament to occupy my thoughts. At last, numb with shock and cold, I was washed on to a rocky island. I spent a week or more there before the sprites I conjured were able to find a ship and lead it to me . . .'

'We thought you lost along with Archimage Balthazar, master,' put in Mercutio.

'Perhaps I should have been. I should have dived

to look for him. I was young then, a strong swimmer, while he was frail. For all his wizardry, he relied on my strength for protection that day, Mercutio. I should have exhausted my spells in searching for him . . . plunged into the depths . . . railed against the very heavens for bearing him away. But I did not, Mercutio. Instead I clung to a timber and thought of my own safety.'

Magnus had spoken with such bitterness that Mercutio could have wept. He had seen his master torment himself over Balthazar's death before, but never with such vehemence. 'You could have done nothing,' he maintained. 'At least you have kept his teachings alive – brought more apprentices into the study of your secret art.'

'Oh yes,' said Magnus with a curl of the lip. 'I returned here to Truillon and took over Balthazar's position as Archimage. I doubt if he would count that as a great favour.'

There was a sound at the bedroom door. Mercutio went and opened it a crack.

Baskaino stood there in his night-shirt. 'Is the Archimage all right, Mercutio?' he asked. 'I heard a cry just now.'

'It was nothing, Master Baskaino,' said Mercutio. 'A nightmare only. The fever has passed.'

'Is the Archimage well enough to receive visitors?' enquired Baskaino, disliking to be kept at the door by a servant.

Mercutio returned an ingenuous smile. 'Later, I

think. Best you get dressed and go down for breakfast, Master Baskaino.' And he closed the door.

Osric rose and spent the morning in the library. A book lay open in front of him, but he turned the pages listlessly. He had really gone into the library to avoid the others. It wasn't that they did not share his concern for the Archimage, but only that Osric had his own way of dealing with worries.

His parents had always said that he liked to brood. 'Forever mulling things over and over inside your skull, boy,' his father had said; 'no good can come of daydreams, you know.' Then the day had come when Magnus passed through his village: a striking figure, almost regal in his cabbalistic robes, astride his horse like a spirit of the night. He had peered into the eyes of a fey youth and saw some smattering of special talent: the second sight. Osric's parents had been consulted, gold exchanged, farewells said – and Osric rode off on his donkey behind the Archimage. His apprenticeship had begun.

Osric turned another page, listening to the rustle of the ancient parchment, like the dusty wing of a moth. It had been two years since he left his home to come here to Truillon, and he often wondered if he had fulfilled the promise Magnus saw in him that day. He found the runic symbols so difficult to memorize, the spells so hard to master. The others had been here at least a year before him, and it was that headstart in their studies that Osric never

seemed able to make up. Baskaino, aloof and imperious, remembered every lesson with cool precision. Kashor lacked Baskaino's scholastic breadth, but compensated for this by dint of enthusiasm and diligence. In comparison to them both, Osric felt himself a dullard.

A draught made the lamp gutter and stirred the pages of the book. Osric shivered and looked up. Beyond the wisp of smoke rising from his lamp, he saw a blurred image in the amber light. Breath catching in his throat, heart hammering, he lifted the lamp and held it out.

A figure stood in the shadows between the shelves. It was an old man in long velvet robes, leaning on a staff decorated with golden runes. His hand drifted along the shelves like mist on a breeze, endlessly searching for a book he could not find.

He turned, eyes boring straight into Osric's. The face was long and thin, with a wispy beard and bloodless lips. He was very, very old. Only the eyes seemed ageless, liquid jewels brimming with pinpoints of gleaming gold.

Osric thrust the lamp forward and opened his mouth to speak. The old man smiled a broad knowing smile and broke apart, fading into darkness like an image in a soap bubble.

Osric took a faltering step forward. The old man had vanished, but not before he had got a good look at him. His gaze went up to a portrait hanging on the library wall. Osric knew it well – the previous master

of the manse, whom even Archimage Magnus spoke of in tones of hushed reverence. The face was the same.

'Balthazar . . . !' said Osric to himself.

CHAPTER TWO

By lunchtime the Archimage's condition was much improved. He was able to sit up and take a little broth. His face was waxen, his voice lacking its usual booming strength, but the light in his eyes had recovered some of the usual vigour.

Mercutio showed the three apprentices into the room. Outside, beyond the latticed panes of the window, the sky was the same blustery grey as the sea. Cold wind whipped up foam across the waves. But here in the Archimage's chamber Mercutio had built up a good fire, and the air had a warm reek of burnt coriander, a herb renowned for its curative properties.

'Evidently the bee that stung me carried an unusually potent venom,' said the Archimage.

'Perhaps we should have surmised as much from its atypical colouration. Now a poultice of mustard, basil and linden oil must be applied to draw the poison out. Baskaino, you are the eldest and display a special knack for alchemy – prepare that, if you will.'

'Of course, master,' said Baskaino. He bowed and withdrew from the chamber.

'Kashor,' said the Archimage, turning to the next of his apprentices. 'Have you prepared your dissertation on the usages of Earth-magic? No? Do not forget your tutorial is scheduled for tomorrow – off to your desk, Kashor!'

Kashor snatched up his papers and hurried out, so flustered that he almost forgot to wish the Archimage a quick recovery.

Magnus finished his broth and handed the bowl to Mercutio. Then he sat back on his pillows and watched Osric with a thoughtful expression. This scrutiny finally caused Osric to become uncomfortable. 'Master,' he said uncertainly, 'have I done anything to offend you . . . ?'

The Archimage still watched him intently. 'Mercutio,' he said at last. 'You may go. I shall sleep later, but you should wake me at dusk.'

Mercutio nodded and went out, closing the heavy oak door behind him.

Osric was about to speak again, but the Archimage raised a hand to wave away his remarks. 'There is a presence here, Osric,' he said, almost impatiently. 'Focus. Use your gift. Can you not sense it?'

Osric bent his head in concentration. He thought that perhaps he did sense something amiss – a nebulous feeling, like the unremembered aftermath of a dream – but how could he be sure? It might just be something planted in his mind by the Archimage's suggestion. And this might be a test, to see how reliably he could use his sorcerous skills.

Osric feared to appear credulous. 'I'm not sure, master . . .' he ventured.

Magnus made a sound expressing exasperation. 'A presence! It sits behind you like a bat with folded wings, Osric! You know the feeling of being watched . . . You are being watched now, by an entity of considerable force.'

'No, master; it's watching you.' Osric suddenly felt stunned; he had spoken without pausing to think.

'Yes, yes! You do feel it, then.' The Archimage sat forward and clutched Osric's arm. 'Trust your inner vision, Osric. Tell me what you perceive.'

'I sensed it early this morning, master,' said Osric. 'I was in the library, alone. I felt a chill, and looked up to see an insubstantial figure drifting between the stacks. His face was the same as Archimage Balthazar's portrait.'

'You should have mentioned this before,' said Magnus.

Osric hung his head. 'Master, I thought I must have fallen asleep in the library and dreamed it . . .'

Magnus compressed his lips. 'You should have

sensed him haunting the manse. I did. It *is* Balthazar, Osric; his aura is unmistakable.'

'Master,' said Osric fretfully, 'surely you are still unwell. This is a figment of your fever. Archimage Balthazar died many years ago.'

Magnus ignored him. 'Go to my study, Osric,' he said. 'There you will find a lens of green crystal: my scrying-glass. Take it to the library and inspect the area where you thought you saw Balthazar. Then come and report to me.'

Osric did as he was instructed. With the green lens to hand, he went to the library and examined the spot where the apparition had appeared. To normal vision there was nothing to see. Peering through the lens, however, Osric discerned a gold-tinged violet glow in the air. It had the general shape of a man's shadow. Osric returned to Magnus's bedchamber and described what he had seen.

The Archimage nodded thoughtfully. Osric waited a long time and then said, 'What does it mean, master?'

By way of answer, Magnus moistened his finger and pressed it to the drinking-cup on his bedside table. He held it up for Osric to see the distinctive pattern of whorls left on the glass. 'The print of a finger,' he said, 'is unique. No two are the same. So it is with a person's aura: the psychic emanation which this scrying-glass makes visible. The gold nimbus denotes an individual with magical ability, the strength of that ability being shown by the

brightness of the nimbus. Take the lens again and observe me.'

Osric did so. 'You see my aura?' demanded Magnus.

'Yes, master. A blue-grey shadow with a golden outline. It seems to flicker . . .'

'Because I am unwell. The blueness is a personal signature, like the finger-mark I just showed you. Balthazar's distinctive aura was violet. And you note the gold nimbus . . . Was the one you saw in the library more or less bright, would you say?'

'Brighter than yours, master,' Osric admitted.

Magnus nodded grimly. 'Well then, it must be Balthazar. Or rather, his ghost. The question remains: what does he want here . . . ?'

Sunk in thought, he said nothing more. After a prolonged period of silence, Osric sensed he was not needed and quietly withdrew.

CHAPTER THREE

After several days, Magnus had so far recovered as to be able to resume his usual activities. The apprentices noted that he remained pale and walked with a limp (the bee had stung him on the leg). On a more intangible level, his demeanour was withdrawn and sombre. During their lessons he several times lost the thread of what he was explaining, and reacted with brittle bad temper to any errors in their work.

'What is troubling the Archimage?' whispered Kashor to the others as they bent over their copybooks later. 'This morning he overlooked a glaring omission in my essay, yet only an hour ago he lambasted me for something so trivial as failing to sharpen my pen-nib.'

Baskaino gave him a slow supercilious glance before turning back to his own book. 'Your calligraphy was barely legible,' he remarked. 'A blunt pen indicates a blunt intellect, Kashor.'

Kashor fumed but kept silent. After a moment, Osric said, 'The master is out of sorts, it is true. Lately he has been troubled by thoughts of Balthazar, his own mentor.' Osric refrained from mentioning the incident of the ghost in the library, since he felt Magnus was entrusting it to his confidence. He was flattered that he, the youngest apprentice, was held in such trust.

The scratching of nibs on paper continued uninterrupted for a while and then Baskaino said, 'Is there anything specific that brings you to that conclusion, Osric?'

'We all know about the fever-dream!' muttered Kashor under his breath, still smarting from Baskaino's previous rebuke.

'You are both too young to remember much about Balthazar,' said Baskaino after a while. 'He was a legendary figure – like one of the great wizards of ancient times.'

'He must have had many powerful spells,' said Kashor, whose thoughts always turned to the lure of great magic when he had to work at his books.

'Of course he did,' said Baskaino. 'Spells you can never imagine. But, Kashor, you understand nothing if you think that is the measure of a wizard.' He put down his pen. 'Listen, then, if you want to learn the

ways of magic. One story that was told in my childhood recounted how a plague had settled on the Empire. Whole villages became deserted, and if you walked the streets of any town you could never escape the sound of mourning from behind shuttered windows. Bodies had to be piled on to carts and buried in mass graves, since the plague was vicious and swift. You might see a friend hale and hearty one day, only to be startled by the sight of his lifeless corpse on a burial cart the next day . . .'

By now even Kashor, despite himself, had put aside his pen to listen to Baskaino's tale.

'Balthazar went looking for the plague,' he continued, 'and met it on the road to Borghaven. The plague had taken the form of a little old woman carrying a broom, though of course no-one could see that except a wizard like Balthazar. They walked on for a league or so without exchanging a word, but the plague-spirit was curious and finally asked Balthazar where he was bound. "To Borghaven," said he. "I mean to claim many lives there."

'Well, "That you cannot do," complained the plague-spirit. "I have prior claim on those lives . . ." Oh, but this is no doubt just a silly story,' said Baskaino suddenly, turning back to his copybook.

'No, no!' cried Osric and Kashor together. 'Do go on.'

Baskaino shrugged indulgently. 'Well, the upshot of it was that Balthazar challenged the old plague-hag to a dice game. She readily agreed, and the two of

them hunkered down in the middle of the road over the dice she had – two yellow dice carved from dead men's knuckles. "If you win," said Balthazar, "we'll agree that you go on to Borghaven and beyond. But if you lose, you must go back to the land of the dead and never again visit the world of mortal men." The hag nodded, and then they threw the dice . . .'

'And Balthazar won?' said Kashor in an awed tone.

'No, he lost. So they walked on again towards the town. But after another league or so had gone by, the plague-spirit could not restrain her curiosity and she said, "You must have claimed many souls in your time."

'At this Balthazar only shrugged, smiling as though modesty forbade a reply. The plague-spirit licked her bloodless lips with a bloodless tongue and doubtless thought, why take the long walk to Borghaven when she could feast on one who had in turn (as she supposed it) feasted full on mortal souls? Another league passed, then Balthazar said, "I might consider another wager, for it is fine sport. Let us dice again. This time, if I win you must go and never return, just as before. But if you win, you may have the life that beats here . . ." Balthazar touched his heart . . . "but then you must begone from the mortal world."

'The plague readily agreed to this, since she now believed that Balthazar's one life would sustain her more than a thousand paltry normal souls. So she took out her dice and again they rolled.'

'And *this* time Balthazar won?' said Kashor.

'Of course not!' said Baskaino scornfully. 'This was Death whom he diced with. So when the dice were cast, the plague-spirit took Balthazar and led him away to the end of the world and then said, "Now I leave this world never to return, but first I shall have your life." And she raised her broom whose touch was death.

'But instead of flinching, Balthazar only stood there and said: "Our pact was that you would have the life that beats here . . ." So saying, he opened the front of his robe and took out a tiny mouse that had been nestled against his chest, asleep. This he gave to the plague-spirit. She uttered none of the hideous curses that a mortal might when thwarted, but just gave a sort of sigh and then drew back out of the land of the living. And so Balthazar drove away the plague.'

'But how did he know he'd lose the dice games?' Kashor wanted to know. 'Both times? And how did he know to have the mouse under his robe?'

'He knew,' replied Baskaino with a condescending smile. 'That was how great a wizard he was. Great enough to cheat Death.'

'But he didn't even use a spell!' Kashor blurted.

'Pah, you fool!' replied Baskaino in a voice dripping with contempt.

Kashor turned to Osric for support, but Osric could only shrug and say, 'What spell could you use against Death, after all?'

Baskaino had already taken up his quill again. As he returned to his work, he added: 'Great wizards transcend the need for mere spells; theirs is *true* magic. Balthazar was the greatest of wizards. The world will never see his like again.'

Osric stared at the page in front of him, but he could not concentrate. Baskaino's story had put an unsettling notion into his head. Even in his younger days, Balthazar had been able to cheat Death. If he had done so once, why not again – with whatever manifestation of Death had come to claim his spirit after the shipwreck?

At breakfast the next day, Mercutio told each of the apprentices that the Archimage had cancelled their regular lessons. 'He says that you are to attire yourselves in warm clothing and assemble on the jetty,' the old servant concluded.

Naturally this sent a buzz of excitement through the three of them. Kashor, in particular, was consumed with curiosity. 'Are we going on a voyage?' he demanded of Mercutio. 'Should we take provisions?'

Mercutio had seen apprentices come and go during his tenure at the manse, and was amused by the excitability of the young. He suppressed a smile, but there was a twinkle in his eyes as he said: 'The Archimage did not give any such instruction, Master Kashor. I imagine it will only be a short journey.'

They dispersed to their rooms and hurriedly

changed, assembling fifteen minutes later in the entrance hall. Kashor wore an outfit of black leather boots and leggings, grey and black doublet, and a velvet cap. The only dashes of colour were the purple cabochon gem of his cloak-clasp and the long red gryphon feather in his hat. The effect would have been more impressive on a person of greater stature but Kashor, though tall, had yet to develop the powerful physique that Osric saw in his future. At the moment, he simply resembled a gangling scarecrow wound in black cloth.

Osric wore his only travelling-clothes: a plain tunic of brown wool above green cotton leggings, with an oiled woollen shoulder-cape to keep him dry. His leather cross-thonged boots were simple but sturdy. The only adornment was a talisman on a leather thong: a tiny bit of mirror-glass set into green clay. It had no true magical value, but was a gift from Osric's father.

Baskaino took the longest to get ready, selecting a long russet gown with an over-tunic of glistening white samite. His boots and gauntlets were of soft buff leather, fastened with gold buckles, and a large gold pin fastened his ochre-yellow velvet cloak. He had tucked a bright blue handkerchief into his sleeve and – ever conscious of his noble status – wore a slim sword in a gilt scabbard at his belt.

They filed out of the door and down the stone steps that led to the jetty. The sky was like slate, the day dull under a canopy of grey clouds. As was so

often the case, a fine drizzle was driven in from out at sea by the northerly wind. Rather than drenching them it was only a minor annoyance, forming tiny droplets that all knew would gradually permeate their clothing with the familiar damp chill of the region.

Truillon Manse was built on an outcropping of rock that rose from the sea some distance out from the shore. It could be reached from the mainland by means of a stone causeway at low tide, but at other times the sea covered this route and it was necessary to use a boat. The usual vessel was a crescent-prowed gondola painted in incongruous style, capable of bearing eight passengers. It had been at Truillon since Balthazar's time, having been brought back by him after an expedition to the Isles of the Cabiri. It looked thoroughly unsuitable for seafaring, but in fact had the advantage of being propelled by water-sprites, so that no oarsmen were needed.

'Ah, you are all here. We can begin,' said Magnus. He was already in the boat, wrapped in a thick fur cloak and leaning on his staff. While still pale, the fresh air had put him in better spirits and his eyes sparkled as he watched them clamber into the boat: Osric with easy agility, Kashor nervously clumsy, Baskaino fastidiously lifting his robes clear of the water.

'How are you feeling, master?' asked Baskaino as the gondola moved away from the jetty.

Magnus smiled to himself. No doubt it was not the

question they all most wanted to ask, but Baskaino would never be so crass as to betray his curiosity so abruptly. 'I am better, thank you, Baskaino,' he replied. 'Perhaps you will prepare me another poultice when we return – this time with a little more basil, as the sting still troubles me.'

The remark about returning gave Kashor his cue. 'Where are we going, master?' he asked.

Magnus glanced at Osric, who sat in the bow of the boat staring out to sea. 'Osric, what do you perceive?'

Osric jerked his head around, startled from his reverie. 'I . . . I thought there was something huge out there . . .' He peered again southwards, to where the drizzle hid the horizon in wet grey murk. 'It was larger than a ship, rising slowly out of the depths . . . a sound like the thudding heartbeat that an unborn child hears . . .' He pressed his hands to his eyes and looked again. 'No, I've lost it.'

Magnus nodded encouragement. 'That's good, Osric. Very good. What you saw with your second sight is something that lies in the near future. We are going to raise up a spirit of the deep and commune with him.'

The apprentices exchanged startled looks. Kashor said, 'A spirit of the deep, master . . . ?' There was fear in his voice, along with excitement.

Magnus spoke with calm conviction. 'Fastitocalon is how he is known to men: the floater on the ocean currents. According to myth he was birthed in the earliest times of the world, amid the unmelting ice

floes at the bottom of the Great Abyss, when there was nothing but Chaos. In form he is like a great rock, strewn with seaweed, wet sand crusted to his sides. His size is greater than any ship, and when he rises from the salt wave it is like the birth of a new island, long and smooth and black . . .'

Osric pointed into the water. 'Master, he is coming! See, rising up from the ocean bed . . . ?'

The others looked. A huge shadow could be dimly seen in the depths. A rumbling rose through the water to shake the sides of the boat – a sound like the deepest notes of a cathedral organ.

'You all know the incantations,' said Magnus abruptly. 'Join me in them now.'

Hesitantly, the three apprentices sang the chant while the Archimage wove the spell:

'Great spirit of the whale road,
Come, we summon thee:
Awaken from your bed of sand,
And rise from out the sea.'

The wind dropped suddenly. Drizzle hung like a pall in the dank air. The watery groan was joined by a deeper sound: the protesting crack of distant thunder high in the heavens. The sky darkened and flickering lightning could be dimly seen behind the leaden clouds.

Rain lashed down hard out of the sky, making the sea seem to boil.

Then, with a sonorous piping sound, a great black

shape broke the surface and rose, towering like a reef beside their tiny boat. Water sluiced down the flanks of Fastitocalon, where weed trailed and barnacles clung as though to the hull of a giant hulk. A fin the size of a bank of oars slowly stirred, thrusting out a wave of foam.

An eyelid opened larger than a shield. Deepset in flesh like weathered stone, a single glimmering eye watched them – uncaring and immemorially wise, full of fathomless thoughts.

A noise came, resonating through their whole bodies. Gradually they made out the words: THREE QUESTIONS MAY YOU ASK, THEN I RETURN TO THE LOWER WORLD.

Magnus had bared his teeth in a fierce grin, exalting in the success of the summoning. The apprentices clung to the sides of the boat, faint with fear, overawed by the sea-demon's monstrous size and strength.

'My mentor met his doom in your domain, Fastitocalon,' said Magnus.

THE WIZARD BALTHAZAR. YES, HE DROWNED IN MY HALL OF DEATH.

A gust of wind blew down icy rain. Magnus gave a kind of sob and said: 'And does he lie there still?'

THE WEIGHT OF THE OCEAN LAY UPON HIS SKULL FOR FIVE THOUSAND DAYS AND NIGHTS, BUT NO LONGER.

'Then he *has* arisen . . . !' said Magnus. He stared down into the grey waters, and suddenly his face

contorted in a look of horror. Dropping to his knees, he plunged both hands into the brine. His eyes were focused on something the apprentices could not see. But was it a figment of his guilt, or a spectre dredged up from the sea's depths? 'Balthazar!' cried Magnus. 'I tried to save you . . . would have if I could. Why do you return to torment me?'

Osric seized his arm. 'Master, have you forgotten the sea-spirit? It—'

Fastitocalon swung his great fin, swamping their boat. It capsized, casting all four into the water. Osric clung to the keel, his other hand still gripping Magnus' sleeve, and spluttered as he tasted salt water.

Fastitocalon opened his great jaws. Water rushed in, a mighty torrent, pulling the gondola and the four frail figures. A strange sweet smell gusted out of the monster's guts. They saw his teeth, like many polished skulls, poised to grind them.

Baskaino struggled up on to the overturned boat. Osric called to him: 'Help me with the Archimage! He might yet send the monster back!'

Baskaino reached down, hauling Magnus over the keel with Osric's help. But the Archimage only lay there like a beached whale, gasping incoherently as he stared at some inner vision. 'Master!' screamed Kashor, treading water. 'Without you we are doomed!'

Fastitocalon sucked them closer to his cavernous maw. His head reared from the water, ready to dash

down on to them. Osric stared up to see the sky entirely blotted out. The monster's head made him think of the warhammer of Thor, the thunder-god. When it fell, no force on earth could save them.

Baskaino raised his arms, twisting his fingers into the pattern he had been taught. His voice made a lilting chant that somehow could be heard even above the wind and the waves and Fastitocalon's triumphal snorting:

'Great spirit, now avaunt thee!
Return unto the deep;
The waters close above thy head;
Resume thy ancient sleep.'

Silence.

Osric swept water out of his eyes and looked around, baffled. There was no sign of the monster. The waves rose and fell slowly; salt spray hung in the air.

'Sprites, right the boat,' commanded Baskaino as he slid down off the keel with the Archimage. 'We wish to board.' No sooner had he spoken than the gondola tilted and returned to an upright position, bobbing up and down in the water.

Kashor swum over. 'Baskaino, you saved us all,' he said.

'Help me get the Archimage aboard,' said Baskaino. 'He is unconscious.'

CHAPTER FOUR

By evening the drizzle had turned to steady rain. The three apprentices sat in the parlour of Truillon listening to the insistent drumming of droplets outside the shutters.

Magnus had been taken to bed as soon as they returned to the manse. Soaked to the skin, he soon lapsed back into his fever and remained partially delirious throughout the afternoon. As before, he seemed troubled by visions of his dead master. Mercutio had just looked into the parlour to say that there was no change in his condition. The apprentices sat in despondent mood.

Kashor turned from stoking the fire. 'What I can't understand is why this is happening now. After all, Balthazar has been dead for ten years or more, and

the Archimage has hardly mentioned him before now.'

'He has always been troubled by guilt over Balthazar's death,' said Baskaino. 'It is only that he managed to keep it locked away until now.'

Osric had been brooding all afternoon, trying to decide how much he should tell the others. With the Archimage so ill, the responsibility for the decision fell on his shoulders. 'Balthazar is haunting the manse,' he told them now. 'I saw his shade in the library a few days ago.'

Kashor stood open-mouthed at this news. Baskaino must have been equally amazed, but he hid it well. 'I suspected something of the sort,' he murmured, settling back in his chair and placing the tips of his fingers together in contemplation. 'Tell us more.'

Osric got up and began to pace in front of the hearth. 'There is little more to tell. The ghost was searching for something, but seemed unable to find it. I recognized it from Balthazar's portrait. When I confided all this to the Archimage, he had me examine the scene of the haunting with a scrying-lens, and that confirmed that the ghost was indeed Balthazar's.'

Kashor fell into his chair in shock. 'The demon-turtle this morning said that Balthazar had lain on the ocean bed for . . . how long?'

'Thirteen years and nine months,' supplied Baskaino. 'An ominous period for the gestation of a vengeful ghost.'

'But what would he want with revenge?' asked Kashor. 'And what was he looking for?'

Baskaino thought for a moment. 'The second question is easy to answer. We might guess that he was searching for the secret grimoire.'

'Eh?' Osric was nonplussed.

'The book that lists the past masters and doctrinal principles of our college of wizardry,' explained Kashor. 'Yes, such a book is always hidden by magic, so even a ghost might have trouble locating it. But what does it signify, Baskaino?'

'That is where we fall into the region of stark speculation,' said Baskaino. 'I might surmise that Magnus felt he could have done more to save Balthazar – as perhaps he might. Could jealousy of Balthazar's great reputation have caused him to hesitate at the crucial moment? As true a murder might come about through someone's failure to act as out of malice. If that is correct then the ghost has an obvious motive for haunting Magnus.'

'You cannot mean that the Archimage meant for Balthazar to die!' said Osric. 'I'm sure he mourns what happened every day of his life.'

'Mourns – or blames himself,' replied Baskaino. 'Moreover, in view of Balthazar's reputation, Magnus must have felt unsure of his own ability to take over the college. Remember what I told you yesterday? That was just one of the tales that used to be told about the great Balthazar. Would-be apprentices used to flock to Truillon in those days. Now look at

the college's fortunes . . .' He waved a hand around the room. 'A farm-boy, a scrivener's son, and one old servant who is teetering at the edge of his grave.'

'And you,' said Kashor resentfully.

Baskaino nodded. 'And me.'

For several minutes there was only the sound of the rain on the window-panes and the crackling of logs in the hearth. Then Osric said, 'I don't know what else you think the Archimage could have done. Maybe it's true he didn't measure up to Balthazar – I don't know. But at least he kept the college going. No-one else could have.'

'Yes, he did,' agreed Baskaino. 'Perhaps it's not for me to criticize. However, you're wrong about there being no-one else to take over the college. You are both too young to know this, but Balthazar originally had another student: Fyral was his name, a minor princeling. He had garnered a certain renown despite only having been with the college a few years. Had he taken over after Balthazar's death, his royal status would have attracted students and wealthy sponsors.'

Mercutio moved forward into the firelight bearing their supper on a tray. None of the apprentices had heard him come in. 'Please excuse this cold buffet, masters,' he said, placing the tray on a table, 'but I must attend to the Archimage. The fever has not abated.'

'Thank you, Mercutio,' said Baskaino. 'This will be quite sufficient.'

Mercutio nodded and withdrew. At the door, he turned and said, 'Oh, I could not help overhearing what you said, Master Baskaino. About Prince Fyral, I mean. None of you was here then, but I remember him well.'

'What happened to him, Mercutio?' asked Osric. 'Was he also on board the ship with Balthazar and Magnus?'

Mercutio shook his head. 'Oh no, Master Osric. He'd already been expelled from the college by then. A cruel, selfish and wicked young man, he was. Master Baskaino was right in saying he had a certain renown, but it wasn't the sort you'd envy, you see. The day he left I heard such curses as I'll bear with me to my grave, and most likely beyond. He has not been heard of since.'

The Archimage woke from a nightmare drenched in sweat.

It was dark. A red glow came from the hearth, where the fire had burned down to embers. Outside, the wind howled around the tower and up under the eaves.

No, it wasn't just the wind. There was another sound, an eerie cry which recollected something Magnus had heard in his dream. It was his memory – or perhaps his *imagined* memory – of Balthazar's screams as he sank beneath the waves.

Drawn by the sound, Magnus rose from his bed and pulled a fur cloak on over his night-shirt.

Mercutio lay dozing in a chair beside the hearth. Faithful Mercutio. Rather than trouble him with fresh worries, Magnus blew a pinch of powdered phoenix feathers into his face and recited the words of a cantrip: a simple spell to ensure restful sleep.

Then, resting his weight on his staff, he made his way downstairs to the door. The pain from the bee-sting still throbbed, ignored, in his thigh. He pulled open the door and faced a curtain of cold rain. Beyond the porch light, the darkness was draped thickly over the sea. Magnus swayed, clinging to the staff like a bellringer to his rope as a wave of dizziness swept over him.

Again the fearful screeching came out of the rain-swept darkness. Magnus muttered another spell, causing a lantern to appear beside him. In its beam, he saw a flickering figure out on the causeway.

'Balthazar!' called Magnus hoarsely into the night.

The figure drifted off, towards the mainland, with Magnus staggering behind. Each breath came as a hot gasp. The rain trickled down inside his cloak. Sea-spray in his eyes . . .

He was on the beach now. A path led up towards the headland where a circle of ancient monoliths stood. The lantern swung its beam drunkenly, responding to Magnus' swooning thoughts, picking out a figure for a moment. Balthazar was making his way to the headland.

Magnus followed, oblivious as pebbles cut his bare feet, splashing through sandy puddles. The figure

turned and paused on the path ahead of him. Magnus quickened his step, lurching onwards, staff driving hard into the ground as he went. His vision came and went in clouds, burning sweat and icy rain mingled on his brow, his ragged breathing drowned out by the wind's howl.

Trees overhung the path, whipping their branches against the cloud-laden sky. The figure waited until Magnus was almost upon it. He stared into the rain, pushing the lantern-beam up with a giddying thrust of will. It fell full on the figure's face.

It *was* Balthazar!

Balthazar opened his mouth. Magnus stumbled a step closer, waiting to hear his mentor's words . . .

Balthazar's face contorted, eyes starting from his head. A scream of unearthly rage and fear resounded up to the heavens. He lifted his arms, teeth bared. He looked about to lunge for Magnus' throat, but the Archimage did not move. He could only stand stock-still, frozen in sick horror at the sight.

Suddenly the spectral figure shot backwards, receding down the path at incredible speed. Its ghastly howl dwindled as it went. The lantern-light held it for a second, its arms still outstretched to seize, mouth still working in vengeful fury: a translucent image as starkly bright as a dream. And then it was gone.

Like a sleepwalker, Magnus continued up the path until he cleared the woods and reached the circle of standing-stones, perched desolately on the headland

over high granite cliffs. Far below, wind smashed the sea on to the rocks. Each wave broke apart into grey foam, individually ineffective in the assault on the land; but gradually, over the eons, the cliffs would be worn back and the sea would have its victory.

Magnus stopped with the standing-stones around him – a forlorn ring of monoliths raised by a people long extinct. With head pounding and vision swimming, he steadied himself against one of the stones, feeling the leprous surface. Droplets of rain danced in the lantern-light. Clouds moved like galleons under the invisible stars.

A movement showed in the darkness. Magnus looked up to see Balthazar rise into view, drifting at the cliff's edge. Strands of seaweed hung from his arm, and his face was deathly white. The rain drove right through him as he raised a hand to beckon Magnus closer.

Then he spoke, voice like the wind in a deserted chapel: *'Is this the Archimage of Truillon? This invalid?'*

Magnus took a step closer, and another. 'Master . . .' The illness made him reel, clinging to his staff for support. 'Master, I would have saved you! I did all I could! The gods know I would have given my life for you . . .'

Balthazar's white lips broke open in a terrible smile. *'And yet you lived, and I died. You became master of my manse, while I lay fifty fathoms deep with a pillow of hard coral and sand for my sheets. You*

took the title of Archimage; I was forgotten.'

'I have honoured your memory!' said Magnus. 'Not a day passed that I have not thought of you.'

'*Thoughts and dreams . . .*' said Balthazar hollowly. '*I had only fishes flitting through my skull.*'

Another wave of hot nausea caused Magnus to bow his head. As it passed, darkness sliding away from his vision, he looked up to see a change come upon the scene. Green murky light surrounded him, and sand lay under his feet. Sea-stirred fronds rose in banks all about him. Fishes moved above, slow silver lights darting in the gloom.

He looked back. The standing-stones had been replaced by the skeletal timbers of a sunken hulk. He could make out the faded paintwork on its bows: the *Harbinger.*

Balthazar drifted closer. '*Yes, you recognize it: the abode you've shunned these thirteen years.*'

Something pushed up through the wet sand – an arm, bare of flesh, clad in tatters. It clutched at the rotted frame of the ship, pulling itself up: a figure sat up out of the sea bed. Eyeless sockets stared at Magnus from under a barnacle-studded skull. Then another figure arose, and another. The drowned sailors who had crewed the *Harbinger* on her last voyage. They rose on thin legs and scuttled closer, closing in on Magnus with grisly grins.

Magnus stepped back, then gasped as he felt a chill shudder through him. Balthazar was at his shoulder, his hand outstretched. Icy words rumbled in Magnus'

ear: '*Listen to my words and heed them well, usurper. Your place is among the dead . . .*'

Magnus screamed, but it was the soundless scream of a nightmare. Then oblivion struck like a thunderbolt, and he knew no more.

CHAPTER FIVE

'Master Osric, you must come at once.'

Osric looked up blearily from under his bed-covers. 'Mercutio.' He got up, yawning, and pulled on his slippers. The routine gave him time to come fully awake. 'What's wrong?' he asked.

Mercutio gave no answer, but only took him by the arm and almost pulled him along the draughty passage and up the stairs to the Archimage's room. The door stood open, showing a gleam of red light from the fire. Osric entered and gave a gasp.

The Archimage was crouched by the fireside in a puddle of rainwater, hair plastered wetly to his head, the fur robe around him thoroughly soaked. He was rocking back and forth on his heels, eyes wide but unseeing, as he said again and again through

chattering jaws: 'Among the dead . . . Among the dead . . .'

'I woke and found him like this,' said Mercutio helplessly. 'I was here all the time, but I didn't hear him go out. I must have fallen asleep . . .' He hung his head in shame.

The crisis imbued Osric with a calm authority. Without hesitating, he stooped and passed a hand over the Archimage's eyes, murmuring a spell as he did. Unusually for one of Osric's spells, it worked first time. The Archimage slumped forward into his arms, sound asleep.

'Help me get him undressed and into bed,' said Osric.

After a moment of amazement, the old servant hurried to his side and between the two of them they dried the Archimage off and laid him in his bed.

Osric gave the Archimage a cursory examination. 'Going out in this rain cannot have done his fever much good. In addition, the bee sting seems further inflamed. We had better get Baskaino to administer one of his alchemical preparations.'

Mercutio did not hear. 'I was supposed to be keeping a vigil,' he groaned. 'In his fever he must have sleepwalked, but I failed to wake up.'

'Don't blame yourself, Mercutio,' said Osric, laying a hand on his shoulder. 'You've driven yourself all day and night since the Archimage became ill. If anyone's to blame, it's us apprentices. We should have taken turns sitting with him. We

would have, except who could have anticipated anything like this?'

The door opened and Kashor came in. 'What's wrong?' he asked. 'I heard a commotion outside my door. Has the Archimage's fever worsened?'

Before Osric could answer Baskaino came in too, yawning sleepily, his hair tousled. As soon as he saw the Archimage, lying still and pale in the bed, his habitual expression of arrogance changed to one of shock. He glanced at the wet cloak, steaming beside the fire. 'He has been out, then. Sleepwalking. I feared such a development.'

Osric and Mercutio nodded.

'You might have said so,' declared Kashor. 'A sleeping potion could have helped.'

Baskaino shook his head. 'No, it would have been of no use. My limited skill was enough to treat the bee sting, and my potions helped a little with the original fever, but that isn't the problem any more.'

They all looked at him. It was Osric who spoke: 'Then what is?'

'The Archimage has a malaise of the spirit,' he said sorrowfully. 'He feels guilt over Balthazar's death, and the strength of this feeling has drawn Balthazar's ghost back to haunt him.'

'Before I put a spell of sleep upon him, he was delirious. He seemed to see himself among the dead . . .' remembered Osric in dismay.

'What can be done, Baskaino?' pleaded Kashor.

Baskaino spread his hands. 'Nothing can be done.

He has gone out to meet Balthazar's ghost. Now, I fear, he is not long for this world.'

Osric walked along the beach, watching the pale sunlight slant off the water. Pebbles crunched under his feet. It was late afternoon. The Archimage had become weaker and weaker, until finally Osric could not stand to watch the inexorable progress of his illness. He could not bear the company of the others, either – neither Baskaino's proud isolation, nor Kashor's grating agitation.

Arriving at the broken spar of a ship's mast that had long ago been washed up on the beach, Osric rested his hand idly on it. Low tide had revealed a rusted iron plate riveted into the end of the mast, covered with glistening black mussels. As he brooded, Osric prised one of the mussels free. He was on the point of casting it out into the waves when a gleam caught his eye. He looked closer. Inside the mussel was a tiny pearl, no bigger than a fruit pip. Such pearls were very rare; this one seemed especially so. Its blue-grey lustre was enhanced by a golden sheen.

Osric hesitated. The sight stirred some memory at the edge of his thoughts. Then it came to him: those were the colours of the Archimage's personal aura.

Osric felt a sudden excitement. All wizards quickly learn to put value in omens, and he was no exception. An occurrence that to another man might seem a simple fluke could be vital to one who dedicates his

life to magic. Now, with the Archimage's life hanging in the balance, Osric felt impelled by a force beyond himself. Scooping out the flesh of the mussel with his pocket-knife, he washed the shell in the sea and used his sleeve to dry it. Then he moved up the beach and, finding some dry sand, filled the shell.

Osric looked around. He needed a flat surface. A nearby boulder, buried deep in the beach and flattened by the tides of centuries, would serve his purpose. He squatted beside it and cleared his mind of all distractions, then upended the mussel-shell with a flick of his wrist so that the grains of sand spilled out across the boulder.

He turned his mind into a blank slate, allowing full rein to his innate wizardry powers. Suddenly, into his mind flashed a clear runic symbol which his fingers hastily traced into the sand. Osric stared at it and then recognition came: it was a number. Three to the seventh power. 'Two thousand, one hundred and eighty-seven,' he said aloud.

He bent over the grains and patiently counted them, his excitement growing as he neared the end of the count. At last he finished, brushing all of the grains away with a victorious flourish. He had been exactly right.

He sat back on his heels and drew a deep breath. Guessing the exact number of grains of sand in a mussel-shell was one of the many impossible tasks that an apprentice had to master. Osric had never managed it before. Such a task formed one of the

components of any advanced spell. Admittedly, it was only of the first order of impossibility – nothing so difficult as what an adept might attempt, such as catching the north wind in a sack, or finding a rainbow's end. But for a minor enchantment, it was a start . . .

Two more impossible tasks must be completed for Osric's spell to work. For the next, he looked around for inspiration and his gaze fell on the waves that came rolling up the beach to wipe away the footprints where he'd walked. It recalled an old sailors' notion that every seventh wave was the strongest. He knelt at the edge of the sea and pushed his open palm down into the smooth wet sand where the waves came up. It left a deep handprint. Osric stood and backed off as the first wave came surging up to cover the handprint. When the sea pulled back, mustering its strength for another wave, the handprint was still there, only somewhat fainter.

Osric held his breath. If a trace of his handprint still remained after the seventh wave, he would have achieved a second impossibility.

The surf came crashing in, closing its foamy grip over the foreshore. The second wave. As it fell back, Osric saw the outlines of his hand still sketched on the wet sand. The third wave struck with more force – and the fourth, and fifth. Osric stood over the handprint now, watching with hands bunched into fists. If the sheer force of wishing could have sustained the handprint, it would have become an

eternal carving, the sand around it congealed to stone . . . But the truth was that it was getting fainter and fainter with each irresistible beat of the ocean's pulse.

The sixth wave swept up, obscuring what remained of the handprint. As it withdrew, Osric felt a sick sinking feeling in his heart. Only the faintest outline remained – and half of that supplied by his own wishful thinking. It could not survive the seventh wave. Sadly he dropped the pearl he had found on to the impression in the sand, then started to turn away.

The last wave roared up the beach, crashing over Osric's feet. Out of the corner of his eye, he glimpsed a glimmer of light through the colourless water: cloudy blue mingled with gold.

He spun back. The sea drew back like a veil. Almost laughing in disbelief, Osric saw the outlines of his hand as deeply imprinted in the sand as when he had freshly made it. In the palm of the handprint rested the luminous blue-grey pearl. Was it a glint of dying sunlight that had caught his eye, diffracted through the water, or some inner glow of the pearl itself? There was no way of knowing.

Osric's heart was pounding by now. He had never been so close to succeeding with an advanced spell. One more feat was all he needed.

A conch shell had been washed up on to the foreshore. Osric brushed it clean of sand and lifted it to his lips. The ancient druids had used conch shells as horns to summon mermaids out of the sea. That

would be the object of his spell, then, for such a wondrous creature might gift him with supernatural aid.

The sun was dipping low towards the horizon, red light streaking under a heavy layer of violet cloud. Osric judged its position, estimating it would be another three minutes before the sun's disc touched the surface of the sea. For his third and last impossible task, he would blow the horn continuously for that time.

He took a deep breath, filling his lungs, and began to blow. A deep low note rolled out over the sea, its mournful sound silencing the shrieks of the gulls wheeling overhead. Only the soft sigh of the waves on the sand remained to accompany the horn.

Tears came to Osric's eyes as his lungs emptied. Barely a minute had gone by and he was running out of breath. This was how it had always been when he attempted this task – though usually with the silver rune-inscribed trumpet that the Archimage used. 'Blow not with your lungs!' the Archimage used to admonish him. 'The breath should come from the force of your psyche. Imagine the depths of your spirit as the infinite Abyss – think of the winds howling through it. You should have no trouble blowing it till Doomsday, if need be. The only wonder is that the trumpet does not break asunder!'

Osric sank to his knees, his breath failing. The note of the conch descended. He felt as though a grey haze was passing over his vision. He could not

sustain the note. He'd failed . . . never be a wizard . . . just a sorry country-boy with a paltry smattering of talent . . . And the Archimage would die, and he could do nothing . . .

The greyness in front of his eyes became an infinite depth. Howling darkness rushed up to meet him. But instead of engulfing him, it seemed to flow *through* him. He rose to his feet, filled with a surge of inexhaustible power from a hidden reserve he had never before tapped. The conch-horn blared hard across the sea, to Osric's mounting astonishment. Blowing it was effortless now. Everything that had threatened to overwhelm him – all the troubles that beset the college – were no longer unconquerable. An apprentice could only cower and look to his master for help. But Osric was a true wizard now – and, win or lose, his destiny was in his own hands.

The sun touched the horizon, sank lower, finally drawing its light off into the depths of the sea. Still Osric stood, sounding the continuous note of the conch, as the dusk drew in around him.

'Put down your horn,' said a musical voice out of the surf. 'It's served its purpose. I have heard, and come.'

He looked down. Floating under the water near his feet was a mermaid. She lay on her back, hair spread far out into the water around her head, eyes closed like one asleep, arms folded across her breast in repose. Only the slow sinuous undulations of her tail showed she was alive at all.

Her lips opened. Again that captivating voice came out of the water: 'Why have you called me here, man of the land?'

'O sea maiden,' said Osric, 'tell me the mysteries of your realm.'

'This realm has many mysteries,' lilted the mermaid. 'Of what do you wish to know?'

'The Archimage Magnus is beset by troubles,' replied Osric. 'He lies in a fever close to death. Can you tell me how to cure him? Unlock your secrets, I pray!'

'Such matters do not go unnoticed in this silent realm of mystery. Magnus once came close to making it his abode, and saved himself with but a spar of broken wood. His mentor was less fortunate . . .'

'Balthazar! Yes, what of him?'

'He took his last breath of air and drifted into death. On the sea bed he lay a long time, but then a storm sucked his skull up to the surface. A sorcerer skilled in dark arts plucked that grisly catch from the waves and used it to his purpose.'

To Osric these events suggested use of necromancy and storm magic. 'Who was it, that sorcerer?' he asked.

'That I cannot say,' replied the mermaid. 'His magic is too mighty; I fear him. But I can tell you more – last night he walked upon yonder cliffs, bearing the skull with him, wrapped in illusion. And Magnus, thinking to see his mentor's spectre, followed in his tracks.'

'Then Magnus has been the target of malignant sorcery!' thundered Osric. 'By the gods, who has done this?'

'That I cannot say. Dismiss me now; I yearn for the stillness of the deep.'

Osric knew the formula of dismissal. He closed his eyes and bent over the water, as though to plant a kiss on those cold white lips.

He tasted brine, felt something brush against his face for barely an instant. It was lighter than the touch of a moth's wing. There was a soft splash, further out among the waves. When he opened his eyes, he found the mermaid had gone.

Although stunned by the experience, Osric knew there was no time to lose. The conch shell was still in his hand. He tossed it aside and it broke on the pebbles – but by that time Osric was already racing along the beach back to Truillon.

CHAPTER SIX

They arrived at the woodland glade where the trouble had begun: Osric, Mercutio and Kashor. There had been no time to summon Baskaino, dusk being the hour he took his walk on the cliffs.

Kashor held up a lantern in the twilight. He was still rather puzzled by the garbled explanations Osric had blurted out, but he could see that his friend was agitated for a purpose. Naturally Kashor found the agitation infectious. 'What are we looking for?' he asked breathlessly.

'The bee,' Osric panted. 'The red bee that stung the Archimage and started all of this.'

Mercutio stooped over the bushes and swung his lantern, wincing at the pain in his aged joints. 'But what good will that do, Master Osric?'

'It's the key to the mystery,' said Osric in a tone of conviction. 'If we can find it, we may yet save the Archimagè's life . . .'

Osric's certainty in that belief was a spur to them all. They had spent the day miserably waiting for Magnus to die. Now there was a chance – however slim – they searched like men possessed.

At last, after half an hour of frantic scrabbling in the gloom, Osric discovered the dead bee lying on a leaf. He held it up and inspected it in the lantern-light, then showed it to the others.

'It's a simulacrum!' gasped Kashor as he scrutinized it. 'A construct of wire and lacquer!'

'Incredible . . .' muttered Mercutio, dumbfounded to see such a tiny device.

Osric pointed at it. 'An artificial bee, indeed; an ingenious invention.'

'The wizard who made it must have been very clever,' said Kashor. 'I thought such skills were known only to the wizards of long ago.'

'Clever,' admitted Osric, '—and steeped in black-hearted evil. See this sticky residue on its sting?' He touched his finger to the stuff and gingerly licked it, grimacing at the taste. 'Its tail was dipped in alchemical venom. The Archimage was deliberately poisoned – doubtless by the same wizard who has beset his dreams with foul nightmares.'

'Baskaino has a special interest in alchemy,' Kashor remembered.

★ ★ ★

Magnus had risen from a hot dream-tossed sleep to find his chamber empty. Shivering, he went to crouch beside the fire, brooding thoughts swimming in his brain.

He had dreamed again of Balthazar. The images were so vivid that he could see them still, if he closed his eyes . . . The storm, icy lances of rain out of a vast roaring sky. The sea, black and dreadful in its uncaring immensity. Balthazar, frail flailing figure, sucked down to his doom in the maelstrom.

Magnus felt his head pounding. He tried to rise, to return to his bed, but his legs were as weak as water. He slumped, breath rattling painfully, sweat drenching his night-clothes. As his eyelids flickered shut, he was back again aboard the *Harbinger*.

'*Yes, you were so hasty to save yourself. So careful to save your own life*,' said Balthazar's voice.

Magnus opened his eyes. He knew the presence behind him in the room was real, not any mere fever-dream. He did not need to turn around. He could sense Balthazar's aura; he had felt it too often in the past to make any mistake. 'I did not . . .' he protested weakly.

'*It was not sea or storm that murdered me*,' said Balthazar darkly. '*Ingratitude and treachery were the student's gift to his master that fateful day*.'

Magnus stared into the fire. The fever made it so difficult to think, but what the ghost said must be true. His cowardliness was what doomed Balthazar, and his inadequate efforts to continue Balthazar's work

were the chains that bound his ghost to this earth.

Tears suddenly filled Magnus' eyes. 'Master,' he sobbed, 'I was as loyal and loving as any man can be to his lord.'

'Then atone for your failure,' spoke the voice behind him. 'Take up your *athame* . . .'

Magnus' *athame*, or wizard's knife, lay on a table beside the hearth along with his other effects. He reached out a trembling hand, vision swimming in and out of focus, and clutched it like a drowning man clutching a straw. Slowly he raised the knife to position it over his heart.

'*It were better you died with me that day*,' said Balthazar's voice. '*These fourteen years since have been years stolen from the grave. You belong among the dead; now you will join me.*'

A flicker of doubt penetrated Magnus' fever. With the knife-point still poised halfway to his heart, he struggled to collect his wits and think.

'*Why do you hesitate?*' raged Balthazar. '*Use the* athame*! I command you*!' Angrily he drew closer. A floorboard creaked under his step.

Magnus raised the naked blade and turned it towards his breast. Suddenly he stopped, frozen in sudden realization. *The floorboard had creaked . . .* ! It was no ghost that was in the room with him, but a living man!

Tilting the *athame* blade, he looked into the polished metal and saw behind him the reflection of his eldest apprentice, Baskaino.

The revelation was a dousing of cold water that shocked Magnus half out of his fever. He whirled, forcing himself to his feet despite his weakness. Baskaino stared at him in fury, a barnacle-clumped skull raised in one hand.

'So that's how you simulated Balthazar's aura,' said Magnus hoarsely. 'You obtained his skull somehow and used it as the focus for your spells. You Chaos-worm, who are you to dishonour the memory of a noble man in that way?'

'You ask who I am, usurper?' spat Baskaino, an angry grin peeling back his lips. 'Very well, I shall show you.'

He waved his hand, and before Magnus' eyes the illusion that had hitherto disguised him faded to reveal his true identity: Prince Fyral, the wizardly adept expelled from the college years before. He looked closer to Magnus' own age now, streaks of grey in his raven-black hair, fine wrinkles under the eyes. But the expression of arrogant contempt remained unchanged.

Magnus set a faltering step towards Fyral. 'You have drugged me with your potions, but if it takes the last of my strength I'll break you yet – and with my bare hands – for sullying Balthazar's remembrance.'

Fyral quailed despite himself, drawing back slightly as Magnus tottered forward. But then he drew from his robes an hourglass with grains of silver sand. Magnus recognized the device and lunged to

seize it, but his illness made him too slow. Fyral flipped the hourglass over, and as the first silver grain trickled through an extraordinary thing happened. The curtains, stirring in the faint draught, became stiff as though waxed. The flames in the hearth froze into prongs of sculpted amber. Magnus himself became as immobile as a wax effigy, fingers outreached towards Fyral's neck but unable to move a hairsbreadth nearer.

Time stood still.

Expelling his breath in a short laugh Fyral placed the Stasis Glass on the table and, being careful to keep one finger resting on it, turned back to the rigid statue of flesh that was Magnus.

'A handy little device, Archimage,' he purred. 'I'm sure you're familiar with its operation. While the sands flow, time stands still in this room and only someone touching the Glass can move. I hadn't planned on using it: I'd have much preferred to see you take your own life—'

Of course you would, coward! Magnus' thought stabbed like spoken words through the space between them.

Fyral stared at him, alarmed, and then smiled. He saw that the eyes remained unblinking, the lips open between breaths, the chest poised for its next heartbeat. 'Ah, telepathy,' he purred. 'How marvellous – a secret gleaned from the grimoire, no doubt? I'll make it mine.'

Again Magnus' thoughts spoke from behind the

rigid mask of his face. *How irksome it must have been that your sorcery couldn't steal it for you, as you must have stolen Balthazar's skull.*

Fyral gave an evil laugh, exulting in his victory. 'Yes,' he said, turning the skull to gaze into its hollow eye-sockets, 'I used direptitious magic to obtain this from the seabed, then used its distinctive magical aura to give the impression that your dead mentor's spectre had returned to haunt you. The bee's venom? It was an added precaution, the fever weakening your resolve so that you would succumb to my illusions. Of course, you made the whole thing so much easier by trusting to "Baskaino's" curative potions!' He paused, and the smile faded. 'But enough of this: now I shall finish the matter.'

You will receive the proper reward for your perfidy, came the voiceless thoughts of the Archimage.

Fyral's face twisted into a scowl of hatred as long-nurtured resentment was dredged to the surface. 'Self-righteous blustering! You cannot have forgotten, as I have not, the day that Balthazar cast me out from the college. I, a scion of royal blood! I know full well it was you who turned him against me, Magnus – your pathetic bleating about my methods, my sorcerous experiments. Pah! What is white wizardry without a leavening of black? We are none of us spotlessly pure in spirit, as you should know!' Fyral hung his head for a moment, recovering composure after his outburst. When he looked up, it was with a viper's smile on his thin lips. 'Enough. It is time to

dispose of you. Then I will be pre-eminent wizard of the world, and undisputed master of the manse's many magical treasures. Among them the secret grimoire, whose spells will now serve my Lord of Chaos.'

'You say "undisputed"? *I* dispute it, villain!' said a voice from the doorway.

Fyral turned. Osric stood there, with Mercutio and Kashor behind him. In his hands was a small crossbow, used for hunting birds. He levelled this at Fyral's heart.

'Come, shoot your bolt, bumpkin,' said Fyral with a contemptuous sneer, giving Osric but a cursory glance. 'You're too small fry to bother me.'

Osric pulled the crossbow trigger. The bolt shot a hand's breadth over the threshold, then hung motionless in the air, frozen by the magic of the Stasis Glass.

Fyral moved half a pace to one side, out of the path of the crossbow bolt. 'Ah, you've given me some sport after all,' he said with a glance at the bolt. 'I judge it will now hit your beloved Archimage. Let you, his would-be rescuer, become his murderer, then.'

Osric looked at the Stasis Glass. The silver sands had nearly all run through. 'Look again, villain,' he said with a smile. 'There's a special point to what I did.'

Fyral turned scowling and glared at the crossbow bolt. Too late, he noticed what in his arrogance he

had so far overlooked. The bolt was not tipped with a lethal spike of steel, but with only a small pin – sufficient to give a deep scratch, no more. It glistened with a dark green fluid.

'The antidote to your bee's venom,' explained Osric jauntily. 'We collected it from your laboratory on the way.'

Fyral lunged towards the bolt, trying to snatch it out of the air. He was too slow. Magnus' telepathic taunts had tricked him into wasting the frozen seconds of his triumph. Now the last sands trickled through the Stasis Glass. Time, dammed up by the spell, burst on its normal course. The pent-up momentum of the bolt was released, sending it flying across the room to embed itself in the muscle of Magnus' thigh.

'Ouch!' said the Archimage, tugging the bolt out. 'You have a painful way of administering your medicines, Master Osric.'

Osric allowed himself a quick smile. 'If it doesn't hurt, master, then it's not doing you any good.'

Fyral glared from one to the other, incandescent with rage. Obviously knowing that Magnus posed the greater threat, he raised Balthazar's skull and began the chant that would charge it with lethal magical force.

Magnus, already recovering from the venom in his veins, wasted no time on a spell of his own. Instead he drove forward with the *athame* which was still in his hand, stabbing the point deep into Fyral's

shoulder. Fyral cried out in pain, the wound causing him to drop Balthazar's skull before he could throw it.

The skull fell into the bay of the window, exploding in a blossom of occult flame which blew the wall out of the chamber. Night wind howled in through the shattered tower wall, whipping up their robes and flattening the fire in the grate, as Fyral and Magnus began their sorcerous duel.

The apprentices had never before witnessed the unleashing of such wild sorcery. It was nothing like the measured, precise magic of their lessons. Instead, each spell was flung with the furious force of a javelin, each incantation spat out amid curses to freeze the blood. The wind itself and the foaming sea outside seemed almost to pale beside the naked wrath of the two wizards as they locked horns in a struggle to the death.

Fyral drew a blinding torrent of sleet out of the air and sent it flurrying into Magnus' face. The Archimage retaliated by conjuring an elemental from the hearth. The sleet sizzled into steam on the elemental's skin, and then it shot through the air like a lizard made of living flames. Fyral had to conjure a javelin of darkness hastily, piercing the elemental's fiery heart an instant before it reached him. It became a swirl of cinders that fell to the floor. Even as it did, Magnus pressed his attack with a spell that brought a flock of blood-red bats screeching out of the night. The evil princeling might have met his doom, scarlet

fangs at his throat, but he guessed that the bats were illusory and a blaze of blinding light from his eyes caused them to evaporate like dew under the sun.

With a roar born of long hatred, Fyral returned to the fray with an incantation that sent tiny knives flying at his foe from all directions, an attack which the Archimage neutralized with a swirl of his cloak and a rapidly-chanted spell of warding.

Fyral and Magnus were closely matched. The scheming princeling displayed more puissance, his spells driven by the force of thrusting ambition, but in the end it was the Archimage's greater experience which prevailed. Standing fast against an attack of shadowy strands, he countered with a blast of typhonic wind that sent Fyral staggering back, arms flailing, to the breach the skull had blown in the wall.

Fyral tottered at the brink. All thought of sorcery fled from his mind now. His eyes were brimming with panic. He clutched at the broken masonry to steady himself.

Magnus had no mercy for the one who had so sadistically tormented him. He flicked a coil of fire across the room which seared Fyral's hand to the bone and set his robes ablaze. With a guttural cry, Fyral fell back and plunged to his death on the rocks at the base of the tower.

Magnus shrugged free of the tenebrous webbing and went to look down at the fate of his foe. The others did not even hear the impact of the body above

the keening of the wind. 'The elements take no notice of a man's death,' remarked Magnus solemnly. 'Not even a great wizard's.'

'What shall I do with the remains of the Archimage's skull?' asked Mercutio, nodding towards the smoking fragments on the floor of the chamber.

Magnus looked around and smiled. 'Sweep it up,' he said. 'It's just bits of bone now. And, Mercutio, need I remind you? *I* am the Archimage.'

THE END

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

A Solo Quest for a Wizard

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET

This is a HeroQuest adventure for which you will require the HeroQuest board game. You will need a GamesMaster and one player. Rules are the same as for any HeroQuest game, but the adventure has one difference: it is only for a *Wizard*.

Only one Wizard at a time should try his luck at running the gauntlet. If other players wish to take part, the GamesMaster must let them wait their turn to tackle the adventure solitaire.

The description of the adventure begins over the page. DO NOT READ THE FOLLOWING FIVE PAGES UNLESS YOU INTEND TO GAMES-MASTER THIS ADVENTURE. (If no Games-Master is available, go straight to the solo gamebook adventure on page 79).

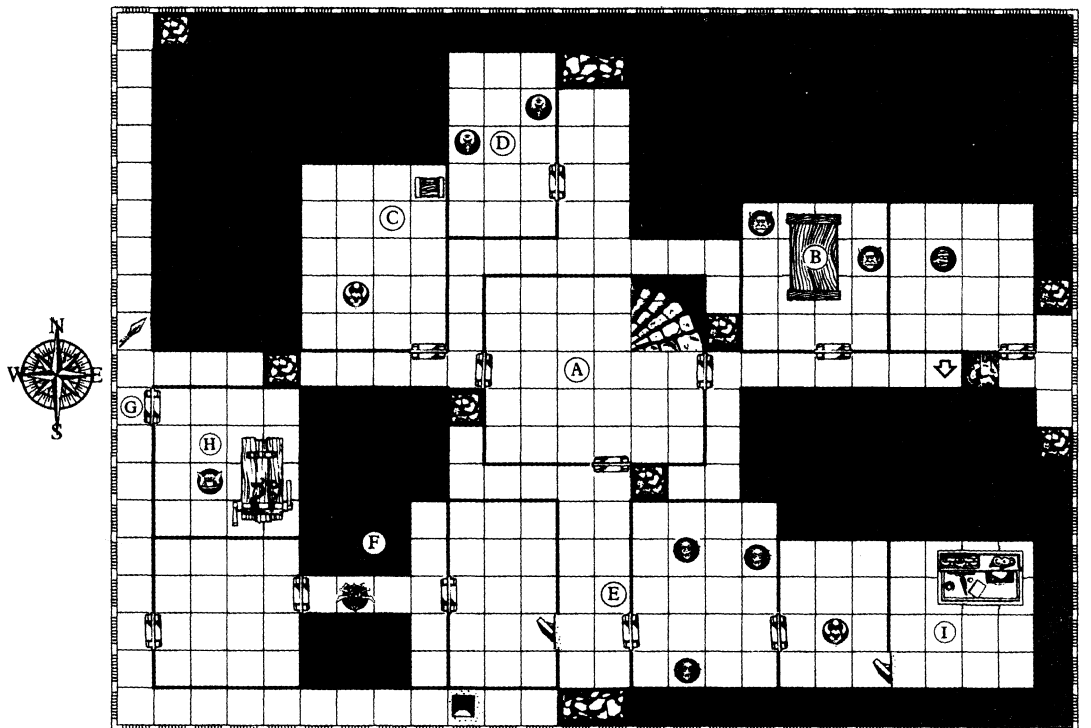
THE ADVENTURE
(GamesMaster only)

Read this to the player:

You have been shipwrecked while crossing the Sea of Claws. Battered and half-drowned, you found yourself seized and brought to a gilded palace of great marble domes and towers. There you were nursed back to health, but despite the luxury of your surroundings you began to feel uneasy. Rather than being an honoured guest, it was as though you were being fattened for the kill.

Today your hosts came to you. They are tall men in long silk robes. From their lead-coloured skin and yellow eyes you suspect them to be Cabiri, a sorcerously powerful race descended from a union between men and sea-nymphs in ancient times.

The Cabiri lords escort you to a stairway winding down into the labyrinth beneath their city. By telepathy they speak to you: 'Below lies a great treasure, the Wand of Galimatias, a mighty wizard of ages past. Find it and return here. Then you will have proved your power as a wizard and you will be free to leave our shores.'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H
I

Wandering monster for this adventure: Skeleton.

A: The room has three doors, each bearing an inscription. The door in the west wall reads: VXU. The one in the south reads: VJSII. The one in the east reads: UPI. Some code perhaps?

B: Two goblins sit at dinner, stirring a bowl in which float steaming human hearts. The item they are using to stir this gruesome feast is a finely-wrought artifact covered with runes. If the adventurer thinks to examine this, he discovers it to be a Wand of Recall.

C: Fog swirls around the floor of this dank chamber as the Chaos warrior strides forth. If he is defeated, the adventurer can examine the treasure chest in the corner: it contains one hundred gold pieces.

D: These two fimir are squatting on the ground playing knuckle-bones, and it will take them one turn to react to the adventurer's appearance (getting up, grabbing their axes, etc), during which time he could either prepare for battle or turn and flee. If the fimir are defeated, the adventurer can take the twenty-five gold pieces they were gambling with.

E: Chiselled into the flagstones of the floor here is the following inscription:

PORT PUX
STARBOARD MEVIS

F: This room consists of a ledge leading out on to a narrow stone bridge (one square wide) across a bottomless pit. (Use cards to mark off the area of the pit.) The gargoyle in the middle of the bridge will posture and growl, but will not actually move to attack until the adventurer either (i) attacks it with spells or (ii) steps on to the bridge himself.

G: Tell the adventurer that the door here is unusually low and narrow – a human being could get through it, but a large monster such as a gargoyle or Chaos warrior could not.

H: This is a torture-chamber where an orc is stretching a barbarian on a rack. (Remember that the gargoyle, if in pursuit, cannot get in through the door.) If the adventurer kills the orc, he has the option of releasing the barbarian. The barbarian will say nothing unless he is released, at which point he will announce that he is Munzuk the Hun, and he now owes the adventurer his life.

Use the barbarian figure for Munzuk. He will accompany the adventurer as a comrade and fight for him. However, after any battle in which he

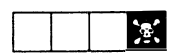
loses at least one Body Point he will demand a payment of fifty gold pieces, otherwise he wanders off.

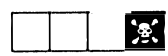
I: Here, amid the clutter on the bench, lies the Wand of Galimatias. Immediately upon taking up this item, the adventurer recovers all the spells he has used so far in his quest through the labyrinth. The Wand also gives a bonus of two Mind Points.

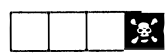
Aftermath

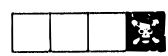
The Wizard can return to the surface (possibly with the barbarian Munzuk in tow) where the Cabiri lords await him. If he is tempted to keep the Wand rather than hand it over, advise him that the Cabiri have a fearsome reputation for sorcery. If he still insists on keeping the Wand, fight the battle using the central chamber of the HeroQuest board. The Cabiri lords' characteristics are:

Move 6
Attack 1 dice
Defend 2 dice
Mind 7

FIRST CABIRI Has all AIR spells Body 

SECOND CABIRI Has all WATER spells Body 

THIRD CABIRI Has all FIRE spells Body 

FOURTH CABIRI Has all EARTH spells Body 

BEYOND THE WORLD'S EDGE

A Solitaire Adventure for a Wizard

BEYOND THE WORLD'S EDGE

This is a solo adventure for a wizard. All you will need are a paper, pencil and a normal six-sided dice.

Be warned that the adventure is not easy. You will need to think very carefully about when to use your spells if you are to succeed. You might need to make several attempts, but if you do win through to the end then you will truly deserve the title of Hero.

INTRODUCTION

You are a wizard of the Virid Coast, in south-eastern Emerais, apprenticed to the Archimage Theodosius. One day, returning after an errand that took you

away from your master's manse for several days, you found the place deserted. You searched high and low for some clue as to your master's fate, but there was nothing. Among his papers you discovered references to 'The Citadel of the Seven Statues' where, by legendary repute, one could learn the secret of eternal life. Only one very rare book is said to give the location of this citadel, a copy of which Theodosius had in his library, but when you went to consult it you found only a gap on the shelves.

The months passed by without word of your master. You had begun to give up hope, fearing that he had perhaps been carried off by the forces of Chaos. Then, this morning, you were walking along the shore near the manse when you came upon a round-bottomed bottle bobbing up and down in the waves. Wading out to retrieve it, you were surprised to find that it contained a note. Even more surprisingly, the note was addressed to you!

You raced back to the manse and are now unfurling the note across your work-bench. You scan it avidly:

The Citadel of the Seven Statues proved more dangerous than I had anticipated. I have been made a prisoner here, and am kept bound in iron chains to prevent any use of sorcery. Fortunately I was able to bribe my gaoler – a hunchback of quite odious habits – and he has provided me with pen and paper.

It falls to you, my faithful student, to rescue me. Go

to my laboratory, where you will find a magic carpet. Take this with you and ride to the easternmost rim of the world, the brink of the Great Abyss. There you must command the carpet to convey you across the Abyss.

You will need spells for your journey. Choose the spells of three Elemental phyla. (You have always resisted a good grounding in sorcery, and in this case I believe your natural inclination to be correct.)

Many dangers will beset you, but I trust you to be equal to the task. Do not fail me.

Your venerable master,
Theodosius

P.S. I will put this note inside my Lucky Bottle and throw it into the river that runs beneath the window of my prison. The unique properties of the Lucky Bottle ought to ensure it is carried down to the sea, and thence around the world until it reaches you. (This will incidentally confirm my theory that there is a sea which encircles the whole world.)

An extraordinary document! You pick up the Lucky Bottle and tuck it into your belt. It could come in useful on your quest. Now read the rules, and then you will be ready to set out . . .

RULES OF THE ADVENTURE

Characteristics
You have four characteristics:

BODY measures the amount of physical injury you can endure. Keep track of your BODY score, which will vary as you are wounded. If BODY is ever reduced to zero, you are dead. Lost BODY points can be healed by magical means, but no spell will ever take your BODY score above its initial level.

MIND represents your mental and psychic resilience. This characteristic measures your resistance to hostile sorcery. Keep track of your MIND score; if it ever reaches zero this means you have literally died of shock.

COMBAT indicates your ability to fight. This usually remains the same throughout the adventure, but can be changed if you lose your weapon – or gain a better one, perhaps. Having your COMBAT score reduced to zero is unlikely to occur, and does *not* indicate death.

SPEED is an indicator of dexterity and reflexes as well as movement rate. If your SPEED is reduced to

zero you have been immobilized and must abandon your quest.

Initial values for each of the four characteristics are given on the Character Sheet on page 93. Permission is granted for you to photocopy this Character Sheet for your use while playing *Beyond the World's Edge*.

Fighting

When you fight an opponent, the battle is considered to take place in *rounds*. Every round, you get an attempt to strike an opponent whom you're fighting. To do so, you must roll *equal to or less than* your COMBAT score on one dice. (For instance, if you have a COMBAT score of 4 then you'll need to roll 1–4 on the dice to hit your foe.)

If you succeed in scoring a hit, this inflicts the loss of one BODY point. Your enemy will also get the chance each round to strike back at you, of course (you must roll the dice for them), and any blow that they land will cost *you* one BODY point.

Remember that if a character's BODY points are reduced to zero, the character is killed.

Multiple opponents

When you encounter a *group* of foes, all of them will get a chance to hit you every round. But, regardless

of how many opponents you are fighting, you yourself can only make *one* COMBAT roll per round. This means that multiple opponents are very deadly, and you must be careful.

Parrying

Instead of attacking in any given round, you can try to parry. You must decide this at the very start of the round, before rolling the dice for any of the attacks for that round. You *must* have a weapon in order to parry.

To parry, you need to roll 1 or 2 on the dice. A successful parry negates *one* blow struck against you in that round.

Monsters *never* parry.

Fleeing

Sometimes you will be given the option of fleeing from a battle. This might not seem exactly heroic – but discretion is sometimes the better part of valour, and by retreating you might even find a better place to make a stand.

If you choose to flee, try to roll your SPEED or less on one dice. Failure means that you lose one BODY point before getting away; success means you manage to escape unscathed.

Encumbrance

You can carry a maximum of four items at any one time. If you come across an item when you are already at your limit, you will have to discard something to make room for it. Note that you start off with a dagger, and if this is lost you must deduct one point from COMBAT until you find another weapon to replace it.

Spells

Before setting out on your adventure, you must choose your spells. There are twelve spells in all, divided into four Elemental categories: Earth magic, Air magic, Fire magic, and Water magic. You can select the spells of three out of the four categories, giving you a total of nine spells to begin with. (It is worthwhile reading the *Introduction* to the adventure before you make your choice, since that might give you a clue as to the best spells to take.) List the nine spells you choose on your Character Sheet.

Spells can be used in battle on any round. However, you cannot do anything else (attack, parry or flee) on the round you cast a spell. When a spell is cast, cross it off your list; it cannot be used again during that adventure. (Spells are not items so do not affect encumbrance.)

SPELLS OF EARTH MAGIC

HEAL BODY

Restores four lost BODY points. It cannot increase your BODY points above the initial score, and does not work on a character who is already dead (ie: who has zero BODY).

ROCK SKIN

Cast at the start of a battle, this *halves* the injuries you take in the course of that battle. Round fractions in your favour (eg: if the battle would normally end with you having lost three BODY points, in fact you lose only one).

PASS THROUGH ROCK

This enables you to move through a solid object.

SPELLS OF AIR MAGIC

GENIE

A magical servitor is summoned for a brief time. He can be commanded to do one of the following:

* Restore one point that you have lost from *any* characteristic.
* Inflict one point of BODY damage on a foe.
* Foretell the future: you can take a look at *one* entry option in advance, before making a choice what to do.

* Open a door or other obstruction that you otherwise could not get through.

SWIFT WIND

This increases your SPEED for a single roll, so that you will automatically succeed in the roll no matter what your current SPEED score may be.

TEMPEST

A localized storm envelops your enemies. Each enemy must roll a dice at the start of each subsequent round, needing a roll of 1–3 before they are free of the TEMPEST and can start attacking again. This affects all the enemies in a given battle.

SPELLS OF FIRE MAGIC

FIRE OF WRATH

This seeks out a single enemy and inflicts two points of BODY damage.

BALL OF FLAME

This strikes all the enemies facing you in a given fight. Each gets a chance to avoid damage by rolling 1 or 2 on a dice. If this roll fails, the spell inflicts one point of BODY damage.

COURAGE

Cast at the start of a battle, this increases your COMBATscore by one point for the duration of the

battle. However, you will then be unable to flee and must fight on to the death.

SPELLS OF WATER MAGIC

SLEEP

A foe can be put to sleep. The spell does not always work, however. When you decide to cast it during a battle, refer to the list here. (There will also be other times you might want to use it; these are listed as options in the adventure itself.)

If you are at **33**, turn to **38**
If you are at **127**, turn to **25**
If you are at **80**, turn to **38**
If you are at **99**, turn to **51**
If you are at **93**, turn to **64**

If the entry number you are currently at is not listed here, the spell is expended to no effect.

WATER OF HEALING

Restores four lost BODY points, up to the limit set by your initial score. It cannot be cast in the thick of battle, and does not work on a character whose BODY score has already reached zero.

VEIL OF MIST

This allows you to become partially invisible. Cast it at the start of a battle. Any time you are liable to be

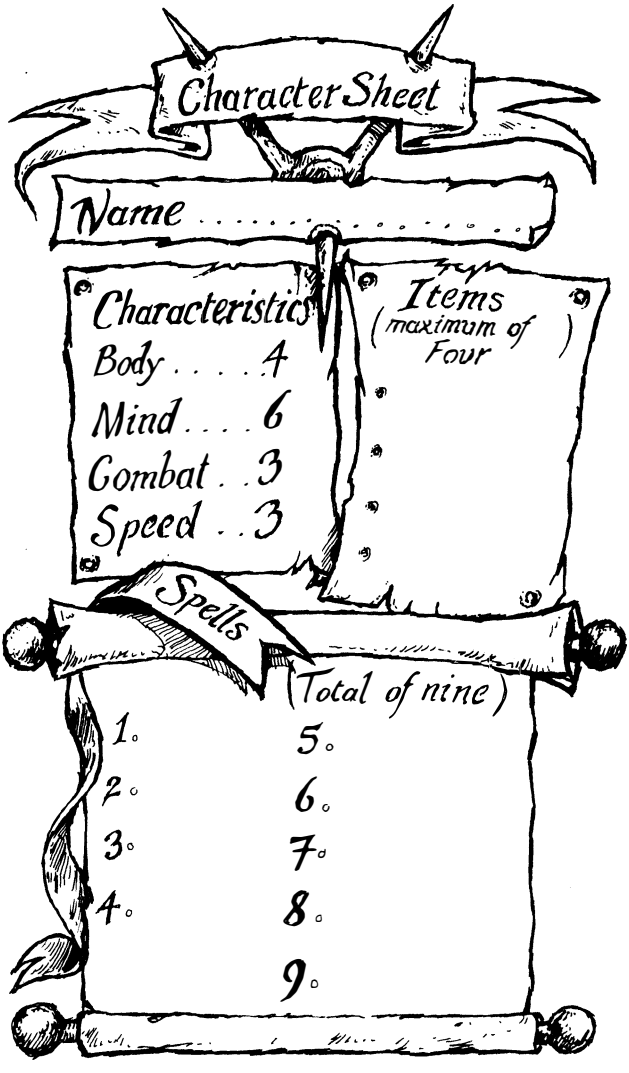
hit during that battle, roll a dice: on a score of 1–3 your opponent missed because of being unable to see you clearly.

Talismans

These are magical charms worn around the neck. They have the effect of adding one point to your score in a specific characteristic. Talismans come in four varieties: the TALISMAN OF BRAVERY (adds one point to COMBAT), the TALISMAN OF FESTINATION (adds one point to SPEED), the TALISMAN OF VIGOUR (adds one point to BODY) and the TALISMAN OF WILL (adds one point to MIND).

You can start your quest with any one talisman of your choice, taken from the collection in your master's laboratory.

A talisman gives its bonus only as long as you possess it. If you lose or discard your talisman, remember to reduce the affected characteristic by one point.


Character Sheet
Name .....
Characteristics
Body 4
Mind 6
Combat . . 3
Speed . . 3
Items
(maximum of Four)
Spells
(Total of nine)
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.

1

Begin by writing the items you are carrying on your Character Sheet. You have a dagger, a magic carpet, the option of one talisman of your choice and, if you choose to take it, the Lucky Bottle. Also choose your spells and write these in the space provided on your Character Sheet.

You set out on foot for the Abyss as instructed in your master's letter. It takes many days of journeying, but at last you leave the roads and teeming cities of civilization behind. Just a single dirt track leads you on to Elvezir, 'the City on the Rim'. You pass through its wide avenues, now deserted except for the birds that nest in the ruined buildings and the weeds and creepers that grow between the huge marble paving-stones. Elvezir was once the capital of a great empire, so it is said. But that was thousands of years ago. In those days, there was no Abyss.

You come to the edge. The road ends suddenly, dropping away into illimitable distance. Below you is the black void of the Abyss. Cold mists seep across its immense void, a sparkling miasmic veil. Looking to either side, you see only the rim of the world as it shades off into the blue haze of distance.

You stare east, across the Abyss. You cannot see the far side. Like everyone else, you had always imagined that it had none – until you read Theodosius' letter.

You unroll the carpet and stand on it. 'Up!' you command. 'Rise, o rug! Fly! Bear me into the east.'

And, with a magical fluttering, it takes off into the air.

Turn to **14**

2

Heavy winds slam into the creature, sending it spinning down helplessly into the Abyss. You watch as it plummets through the thin undulating layers of mist, shrieking over the noise of your magical storm, wings beating madly in a futile attempt to break its fall. Down and down it plunges, steadily dwindling in size until it is finally lost in the limitless stygian depths.

A gruesome death, perhaps, but you have no pity to spare for the grotesque bat-creature after it so senselessly attacked you. Turning your gaze towards the eastern rim of the Abyss, you fly on to greet your destiny.

Turn to **113**

3

The hut is filled with a screech that makes your eyes start from your skull. It comes from the chimney. Suddenly a hideous bone-white face appears upside-down in the hearth, grinning like an open grave as it fixes you with a deathly red stare.

Hard thin fingers reach towards you. Mad giggling fills your ears. A shudder of terror threatens to numb your senses, and you press back against the flimsy wooden wall of the hut. You have only moments to

act before the phantom lays its fearful hands upon you.

If you intend to fight it out, turn to **28** if you have the codeword OPHELIA on your Character Sheet – or to **41** if you have not acquired this codeword

If you prefer to rely on your sorcery, turn to **16**

4

While Terpitia bustles about preparing a meal, you sit on the porch and watch the sun sink amid a red swathe of clouds. As night closes in, the moon rises clear and full and the stars sparkle out of the darkness.

A light breeze rustles the trees, bringing the haunting notes of a harp from somewhere down by the river-bank. You sit and listen to the music – a melody of exquisite beauty that mingles with the moonlight, night and river-scent to create an enraptured mood. For this brief time, the cares and worries of your quest are entirely put aside. You surrender yourself to the moment.

If you call Terpitia out on to the porch to ask her who the harpist is, turn to **17**

If you leave her to prepare the evening meal, turn to **29**

5

You have slain the dreaded hydra – a feat worthy of the likes of Hercules! This will indeed give you a tale

to tell your master, if you succeed in rescuing him.

But first you have the problem of finding your way out of the marsh. You look all around, but you lost your bearings during the fight. The fog surrounds you, blanketing out any distinctive feature of the landscape. All you can see are the phantom trees looming between tendrils of drifting fog.

Choosing a direction at random, you press on. The mist deadens all sounds, so that nothing can be heard except for the sucking of mud at each step you take.

Then you feel the hairs rise on the nape of your neck. Fear enfolds you with icy fingers as a sound reaches your ears: a wet slithering, as though a large snake were moving through the miasma towards you.

Roll one dice. If you get less than or equal to your MIND score, then you manage to remain calm and walk on at a steady pace – turn to **140**

If you roll more than your MIND score, you give in to panic – turn to **18**

6

The plain stretches on and on. You walk until your legs ache, but still there is no end to the dreary flat landscape.

Towards sunset, the sky looks like a canopy of scarlet, gold and azure green. You come to a standstill, overawed by the beauty of this strange land and by a sense of your own insignificance. Then, as you stand there in the gathering dusk, the faint strains of music reach your ears.

Moving towards the sound, you catch sight of the tents of a nomad encampment. The nomads' horses are tethered beside the largest tent, but there is not a single person to be seen – not even a sentry guarding the horses. Think how useful a horse would be for your journey!

As you approach the tent, you can hear the sound of stamping feet mingling with the harp music coming from within. It sounds as though people are dancing with great gusto but, curiously, there is no singing. An odd nomad custom . . . or something more sinister?

If you take advantage of the absence of sentries to steal a horse, turn to **58**

If you continue on your way on foot, turn to **107**

If you decide to take a look inside the tent, turn to **71**

7

Tantrabolus is as good as his word, and you are not attacked. The gate remains obstinately locked, however – obliging you to use either GENIE or PASS THROUGH ROCK in order to leave.

If you have at least one of those spells, cross it off your list. You can then return back down the path and continue on your way – turn to **6**

If you have neither spell, your only option is to return to Tantrabolus, accepting his offer of instruction in magic. Go to **31**

8

A miniature storm gathers in moments, raging inside the canopy of the tent. Thunderclaps entirely drown out the devilish harpist's music, and the nomads cease their uncontrollable dancing.

You stride across towards the harpist with murderous intent. He glares in fury, but for all his frantic plucking at the harp, he is powerless to stop you. You cannot hear a single note over the din of the tempest.

EVIL HARPIST: COMBAT 3 BODY 1

If you flee, turn to **107**
If you fight and win, turn to **119**

9

As you make ready to set out, the chieftain presents you with a haunch of dried horsemeat. 'We are poor people, with few of the luxuries enjoyed by civilized folk,' he says, 'but we could not let you go without making some sort of gift. This horsemeat will keep for weeks if need be, and may provide you with a nourishing meal when you are in need of one.'

Thanking him, you head off in the direction of the rising sun. Note that you have a haunch of dried horsemeat. You can eat this at any time except when in combat, and it will restore one lost BODY point.

Now turn to **59**

Digging your fingers into any cracks you can find, you slowly ascend the monumental black wall of the citadel. The climb is hard. Sweat soaks your clothes and your breath rasps in the dry dusty air. Several times you nearly slip, and are left clinging to the wall with pounding heart as you steel your nerve to climb further.

At last you reach the top. With a grateful gasp, you drag yourself up over the parapet and on to the safety of the battlements.

But you cannot relax yet. No sooner have you reached the top of the wall than a flock of ragged black ravens come soaring up from the courtyard below. Their harsh croaks of hatred indicate they mean to drive you back off the battlements.

FIRST RAVEN:	COMBAT 2	BODY 1
SECOND RAVEN:	COMBAT 2	BODY 1
THIRD RAVEN:	COMBAT 2	BODY 1
FOURTH RAVEN:	COMBAT 2	BODY 1
FIFTH RAVEN:	COMBAT 2	BODY 1
SIXTH RAVEN:	COMBAT 2	BODY 1

You must fight them all at once – in other words, all the ravens get the chance to attack you every round, while you just get one attack in return. So, even though they are individually weak, they might easily overwhelm you by sheer weight of numbers.

The only way to flee from the unkindness of ravens

would be to jump off the battlements into the courtyard.

If you resort to that, turn to **35**

If you kill them all, turn to **48**

If you fail to kill them all, you experience a terrible pain as the ravens pluck out your eyes, before a fearsome drop to the courtyard below. The ravens follow – to feast on your lifeless body . . .

11

The stairs take you far up into the citadel. The only sounds in the narrow stairwell are of your breathing and the scuffing of your boots on the stone steps. Suddenly you pause. Your master must lie somewhere close at hand – you can sense it. But it seems strange that there is no guardian to prevent intruders reaching this far . . .

Do you have the codeword IMMOLATE? If so, turn to **111**

If you have not written down this codeword, turn to **99**

12

Although warm, the day becomes increasingly overcast as grey clouds pile up from the west. You follow the course of the river as it meanders across the bottom of a broad valley. Cranes prance slowly through the rushes, goggling at you along their thin

beaks. Once you are startled by a great beast larger than an ox, which rises up from wallowing in river mud to go stomping off through the undergrowth. You instantly raise your hands, ready to weave a spell, but the strange beast seems to pay no more attention to you than to the flies buzzing around it.

At last you arrive at a lake which is shrouded in thick mist. At its fringes, the lake merges into dank marshland. Where the river debouches into the lake, there is a narrow stretch of firm ground. You see a weathered old rowboat pulled up on to the lake shore, and beyond that is a ferryman's hut with a barge tethered to the jetty outside.

As you ponder the best route on from here, the ferryman emerges from his hut. His gangling limbs and small pot-bellied torso remind you of a sort of comical insect – an impression which is only strengthened by his wide eyes and purse-lipped mouth.

'You will not want to take that out on the lake,' he says, wagging a finger as he sees you inspecting the rowboat.

'Why not?' you ask. 'Apparently it has been abandoned – and, while not in perfect repair, it is in good enough condition for a short voyage.'

The ferryman shakes his head. 'Mist-phantoms haunt the lake,' he asserts. 'My barge has been blessed by a priest, and the phantoms will leave it alone, but if they find you in that rowboat then they

will suck out your soul as surely as a man drains a whelk from its shell.'

You come over and look at his barge. There is indeed a talisman hanging from the prow and, though you do not recognize the specific runes, it looks authentic enough to bear out his story. 'How much for the crossing?' you ask him.

After some haggling, he sets his price at two items.

If you have two items that you are willing to part with, cross them off your Character Sheet and turn to **104**

If you cannot or will not pay his fee, you can either try making your way around the lake on foot through the marsh (turn to **127**) or else cross in the rowboat (turn to **116**)

13

The library is a draughty place with a dank sepulchral smell. There is no fire; mildew stains the covers of the books, and mist has dampened their pages. Spiders scuttle across the shelves as you search for information, scanning the crumbling pages by the light of a single guttering candle.

At last you rise from your work. You have spent hours in research, but to no avail. Now your body feels cold and stiff, and you are suddenly anxious to leave this gloomy place. You hurry outside and get on to your carpet, impelling it up into the sky with magical words of command.

You rise out of the mist like a hulk bobbing up out of the sea. Still shivering from the miasmic atmosphere of the lost city, which has pervaded your bones with a deep chill, you fly on into the east.

Dawn fringes the horizon ahead, gold light sketching the outlines of a cliff. You have reached the far side of the Abyss!

Your elation is abruptly swept away by a strange feeling. As the sun rises, its rays seem to burn into your eyes. The heat makes you giddy, and you utter a dreadful sigh as you realize the truth. The city where you tarried was the land of dead people. The time you spent there, breathing the gelid vapour of that realm, has leeched the life out of you. You are now one of the undead – a creature who must hide from the sight of the sun.

You are no use to your master now. You know there is only one thing you can do, one place for you to go. You turn the carpet around and head back towards the lost city of Nifelheim. That is your true home now, and you shall dwell there until the end of time . . .

14

Not without a tremor of fear, you fly out from the eastern edge of the world across the vast uncharted chasm known as the Abyss. Your magic carpet soars aloft through wisps of cloud that become steadily thinner, until finally you are flying under a sky of

flat, clear night-blue. Beneath you, the black void of the Abyss is filled with miasmic vapours which seethe like heavy fog in the cold hollows of a moor.

Night and day seem to have no meaning here. For a long time you lose sight of the sun, and gradually all colour drains from the heavens until they are almost as impenetrably dark as the gulf below. On your tiny carpet, you feel no more than a speck suspended on the wind above the endless expanse of nothingness. You glance down only seldom, for it is like staring into the End of Time.

Then, as you hurtle on eastwards, you spy something far down in the depths of the limitless chasm. They are dim and distant, but unmistakably real: glimmering lights in the darkness! You are astounded. How can it be – lights, down there in the Abyss, a thousand leagues from the last city on the earth? It seems impossible that any creature should live in the inhospitable sunless cold, where the thick vapours are said to spell death to any living thing.

If you are overcome by curiosity and must investigate, turn to **26**

If you prudently fly on into the east, intent on your quest, turn to **39**

15

The carpet shudders, rises a short distance, ripples like a sheet in the wind – and then stops. For less than a second you hang suspended in the air. You

have time to turn and, seeing a branch, reach out desperately for it . . .

The carpet drops out of the sky. A brief sensation of weightlessness is followed by many painful buffets as you crash through the branches of the jungle. You fall to earth in a bank of ferns which go a little way towards cushioning the impact. Even so, the breath is dashed out of your lungs and you lose one BODY point.

If you survived the fall, you give a groan and manage to sit up. Wincing with pain, you look around for your carpet and finally spot it hanging a hundred feet up from the end of a branch. Since it has obviously run out of magical power, there is no point in risking a perilous climb to retrieve it. Nor is there any sense in wasting a spell trying to dislodge it from the branch. You decide to continue on foot.

Turn to **40**

16

Which of the following spells will you try:

COURAGE? Turn to **54**
BALL OF FIRE? Turn to **67**

If you don't think either of these will be effective, your only recourse is to fight: if you have the codeword OPHELIA on your Character Sheet, turn to **28**; if you do not have this codeword, turn to **41**

She comes out wiping her fingers on her apron and sits with you listening to the harp. When at last the music is finished, she waits until the echo of the last note has died away in the night, and then she turns to you. 'That is the music of the river-elemental,' she says. 'Sometimes, when the mood strikes him, he creates such marvellous melodies from the sounds of the water. However there is malice hidden within the beauty, for it is said that the elemental is a servant of Chaos and will sometimes make a gift of a magical harp to a human who agrees to work mischief. Such a magical harp has the property that all who hear it played must dance, and will continue to do so until the harpist stops – or until they drop from exhaustion.'

'How very fortunate that the elemental's own music doesn't have that effect,' you reply.

'It too has a drawback, despite its beauty,' says Terpitia, nodding her head towards the eastern horizon. You can now see a faint glow of gold in the sky there. It is nearly dawn.

You leap to your feet. 'How is this possible? It seemed we were only listening to the harp for a few minutes!'

Terpitia shrugs. 'It distorts the sense of time. Often I have known an entire night to fleet away, hours lost in what seemed a too-brief moment, while I sat listening to the elemental's music. But it is just the price one pays for enjoyment of such beauty . . .'

'It is all very well being philosophical,' you tell her, 'but I have an urgent mission that will brook no delay. Now I must set out, and without even the comfort of a good meal and a night's rest!'

Hastily gathering your belongings, you bid Terpitia farewell and set out on your way.

Record the codeword STROMKARL on your Character Sheet. Then turn to **12**

18

Running for your life, you stumble headlong into a patch of treacherous quagmire. You snatch at an overhanging bough, but it breaks off in your hand. There is nothing you can do to stop yourself sinking. Within moments the mire has reached the level of your waist. Your flailing arms strike the ground with wet slaps, unable to find solid purchase with which to drag yourself free.

The mud reaches to the level of your chest . . .

To your neck . . .

To your . . . *glub* . . .

19

It is a hard climb, and by the time you reach the top you are breathing heavily. Over the walls of the outer courtyard, you see tall black towers looming against the sky. A sign creaks on an overhanging post, and you peer at it until you have made out the faded words: *The Academy of Mysteries*.

The gates stand open for you to enter, but close of their own accord as you pass through. You watch in slight surprise as the padlock snaps shut and locks itself. Clearly there is sorcery at work here – but that is only what you expected of such a forbidding place. As yet you have no cause for alarm.

You cross the courtyard to a heavy door, which opens as you approach. At first you assume that this is more magic at work, but then a stooped old man shows himself in the doorway, huddled inside long black scholar's robes. He beckons you over. 'Come in, come in,' he urges. 'It's much warmer inside.'

He shows you into a musty wood-panelled hall with several desks and a lectern at the far end. Here, daylight penetrates only dimly through the dusty panes. The floorboards creak anciently underfoot as you walk along the hall, studying the inscriptions painted above the narrow latticed windows.

'You have arrived at the Academy of Mysteries,' announces the old man in a reedy voice. 'I am Tantrabolus, the schoolmaster. You can study here and gain great sorcerous knowledge. But, when you go to leave, the Evil One will do his best to snatch you – and those that escape him rarely get past his gatekeeper. So choose: if you go now, you can pass unmolested. Stay, and you stake your life – a fitting price to pay in the pursuit of knowledge.'

If you tell Tantrabolus that you will attend his lesson in magic, turn to **31**

If you decide to leave, turn to **7**

20

A tall muscular figure appears out of a wreath of smoke and bows in front of you, pressing his hands together in an oriental gesture of respect. 'Salaam, O Master of Enchantments,' he says in a deep voice. 'How may I serve you?'

'By removing this padlock and opening the gates,' you tell him. 'I am now ready to depart.'

The genie bows again. 'As you command, so shall it be.' He takes hold of the padlock and it crumbles into rust. Then, thrusting with his huge arms, he pushes the gates open for you to leave. An instant later he has vanished.

You saunter out of the gates, only to be set upon by a black-armoured knight wielding a huge poleaxe. Had you so soon forgotten Tantrabolus's warning about the Evil One's gatekeeper?

GATEKEEPER: COMBAT 4 BODY 3

If you flee past him down the path, turn to **6**

If you fight on and kill him, turn to **45**

If you fight on, but fail, your last sight is of the giant axe descending – straight for your head!

21

The harpist slumps forward over his instrument, snoring soundly. The moment his fingers fall from the strings, the hypnotic spell of his music is broken.

The nomads start to shake their heads, dazed and weary after many hours of uncontrollable dancing.

You give the villainous harpist no chance to recover. Snatching up a nomad's spear, you run across the tent and despatch the wretch with one swift blow.

Turn to **119**

22

You have got almost halfway to the top when your boot slips on a patch of moss clinging to the stonework. You try to grab at a handhold, but the purchase is too meagre and your grip is too weak. With no time to even cry out, you plummet back down the wall.

Bone-dry and hard as stone, the ground comes up to whack you like an anvil. Lose one BODY point. If you are still alive, you can try the climb again (turn to **133**), or else make use of a spell – either GENIE (turn to **109**) or PASS THROUGH ROCK (turn to **121**)

23

You draw the fabric of the gonfalon across in front of you and wait for them to arrive.

They loom out of the darkness beyond the arch: seven figures of stone, statues come to life. Each step they take makes the floor shudder underfoot. Each sound they utter is like an echo in a rock canyon.

'Where is the table?' grates the first, arms outstretched in front of him like a sleepwalker. As he advances slowly, a lumbering step at a time, you suddenly realize: they are *blind*.

'It is intolerable that we should go fumbling our way to table like old dotards!' intones another.

'It is our shirky henchman's fault,' the third statue growls. 'He should be here. He will suffer foul torments for his laziness!'

The henchman . . . do they mean the archer who shot at you when you arrived? No matter; now that you know they cannot see, you can breathe more easily. And now, looking out more boldly from behind the gonfalon, you see something else. The last statue wears a set of keys at his belt.

If you creep past them and head up the stairs, turn to **11**

If you go up to them and pretend to be the missing henchman, turn to **36**

If you go over and sit at the table, turn to **49**

24

Legs and arms driving like pistons, you charge up the stony path towards the gate. Sheltered within the narrow window, the archer has the leisure to draw a bead on you and send a volley of arrows towards you. His aim is unerring, and three times you feel burning agony as arrows rip into your flesh.

Lose three BODY points. If you survive, you force

yourself to keep going despite the pain. With a cry of relief you reach the shelter of the gate and hurl yourself forward, scrambling out of sight of the archer. At this angle, with you almost directly below him, bowshots are impossible.

Gasping, you glance up at the roof of the porch and see a row of holes in the stonework. Murder holes: apertures through which defenders of the citadel can pour boiling oil on enemies who reach this far. You must gain entry quickly, before the murder holes start to spout their deadly shower upon your head!

Turn to **97**

25

Your spell affects all but one of the hydra's heads, which droop like wilting flowers. Return to **127** and continue to fight, but reduce the hydra's COMBAT score to 1 for the remainder of the battle.

26

As you descend, a staggering sight takes form out of the mist. Here, in the middle of the great Abyss, a plateau of rock stands above the bottomless void. Thin mists brim around it like a sea. And on the plateau, you see the grey walls and black-tiled rooftops of a city.

Coughing, you raise your sleeve across your

mouth. The dank fog, seeping into your lungs, chills you to the marrow. But, enticed like a moth to the wan lights of the city, you descend further until you can make out the shapes of people moving through the narrow cobbled streets.

This is truly an extraordinary discovery: an inhabited city a thousand leagues out from the eastern edge of the world. Could this single plateau have been left when the rest of the Abyss fell away in ancient times? Are the people you can see below the isolated remnants of that lost civilization?

If you take your carpet down into the city, turn to **112**

If you want to fly past without investigating, turn to **39**

27

Realizing that the carpet is running out of magical power, you lose no time in descending to the ground. You sink through the forest canopy into a world of sun-cracked green-tinged gloom. An eerie hush descends on the jungle, all of the birds and chittering monkeys falling silent to watch you. Great tree-trunks slide past like the buttresses of a cathedral as you drift down, the carpet rotating slowly as it goes. Finally you alight on the forest floor. The silence persists for a few seconds more, then gradually the intrusion is forgotten and the clamour of wildlife returns to the scene.

You step off the carpet, staggering like a sleep-walker, drunk on the perfume of the jungle flowers and on the splendour of your surroundings.

After a few steps, you remember the carpet and glance back. It is useless now, its enchantment entirely used up in bringing you across the great gulf between the worlds. You could roll it up and take it with you – but it is only a normal rug now, and it would be quite inconvenient to carry in the steamy warmth of the jungle.

Decide whether to abandon the carpet here or not, then turn to **40**

28

Clammy fingers seize and rend you. The hantu's clutch is like ice, its breath like stagnant water, its laugh like madness. With gasps of horror, you struggle for your life.

Suddenly it is gone, departing with an irate howl up the chimney. You see that Sakai has kicked out the last embers of the fire in the grate. 'I should have thought of that!' he rebukes himself. 'The smoke going up out of the chimney gave the hantu the excuse it needed to enter, you see.'

Slumping in the aftershock of panic, you take stock of your injuries. You have been reduced to one BODY point. Additionally, you know that it will be a long time before you can sleep soundly again; the hantu's grisly face will haunt your dreams for years to come. Reduce your MIND score to 4.

You huddle in a corner of the hut and stare at the ashes of the fire until daybreak.

Turn to **79**

29

Suddenly Terpitia calls you inside. You are staggered to see the splendid feast she has prepared in your honour. There are fried corn cakes, loaves of fresh-baked bread, a stew made with shallots and turnips, griddle-cooked trout garnished with garlic and herbs, small omelettes stuffed with spiced meat, and a salad of carrots and lettuce. All is washed down with a stoop of refreshing country cider.

'A most excellent dinner!' you declare at last, draining the last drops of your cider and wiping your lips.

'It is small enough repayment for your help today,' she says with a smile.

She shows you to a bed, and soon you are settled amid the freshly laundered sheets. Moonlight streams in through the open shutters. The strains of harp music can still be heard faintly from outside but gradually they fade away, and by the time they are gone you are sound asleep.

You awaken refreshed and with renewed vigour for your quest. (If wounded, you can recover one BODY point.) Terpitia offers you a huge cooked breakfast, but you are still replete from the night before and make do with just a slice of buttered

bread. Then, taking your leave of Terpitia, you set out on your way.

Turn to **12**

30

You cower in the bottom of the boat under a tarpaulin and pray they'll miss you.

They don't.

31

Tantrabolus fetches a number of books and goes up to the lectern, from which he holds forth at great length. At first you find the lesson tedious, but then you realize that he is telling you about a variety of sorcerous techniques and occult principles that you had never previously considered.

You can now acquire the three spells of whichever category (Fire, Earth, Air or Water) that you did *not* select at the start of the adventure.

'You're a worthy student, I must say,' says Tantrabolus once the lesson has ended. 'Most attentive. But no matter how hard you study, you'll most likely end up with a gravestone for a diploma!'

He wanders off mumbling to himself, leaving you alone in the shadowy schoolroom. Mindful of his earlier warning, you cross the floor cautiously and then make a sudden dash for the exit.

A loose floorboard suddenly opens just beside you and a huge hairy hand thrusts up, sharp fingernails

clutching to seize you. You must act quickly, or be ensnared.

If you want to use an item, turn to **44**

If you think a spell might help, turn to **57**

If you prefer to rely on your innate agility, turn to **70**

32

The spell allows you to pass straight through the heavy granite blocks of the wall. It is like moving through cold water for an instant. Emerging on the other side, you notice a warrior in black armour standing beside the gate. If you had exited that way, he would certainly have ambushed you. As it is, he gives a roar of anger and stomps towards you, the metal plates of his harness clanking hollowly with each step. Seeing no benefit in an unnecessary battle, you hurry off down the path at a pace that the warrior cannot match.

Turn to **6**

33

Shrugging off the hypnotic lure of the music, you close to do battle with the mischief-making harpist.

EVIL HARPIST: COMBAT 3 BODY 1

In the unlikely event that you flee, turn to **107**

If you kill the wretch, turn to **119**

34

Your heels kick up flurries of dust from the gravel-strewn path as you go racing up towards the citadel, dodging to and fro. From the vantage-point of his window, the archer sees you coming. His first arrow misses, sighing lethally as it streaks over your head. He takes more time with the second and third, waiting to anticipate your position before shooting.

To dodge each of the remaining two arrows, you must roll equal to or less than your SPEED score on one dice. Do this for both arrows. Each one that hits inflicts one BODY point of damage.

If you survive, you keep going until you reach the lee of the gate. You press yourself against the colossal oak portal, hidden from the archer's line of sight by the jutting stone portico. You slump into a crouch and get your breath back. For the moment, at least, you are safe.

Or are you? Glancing up at the roof of the portico, you see a row of holes in the stonework. These are murder holes – channels through which defenders of the citadel can pour boiling oil or acid on enemies who are at the gates. You must gain entry to the citadel quickly, before the murder holes start to sluice an agonizing rain upon you.

Turn to **97**

35

The onslaught of hard beaks and rustling deathly plumage is more than you can stand. As your nerve

snaps, you throw your hands up over your head and leap from the battlements.

As luck would have it, you land in a pile of straw. Even so, the impact still jars every bone in your body. For several seconds you can do nothing but lie there, racked by pain. Maybe for longer than a few seconds: deduct two BODY points and, if you are still alive, turn to **145**

36

You step lightly forward and address the statues: 'Masters, I apologize for my tardiness, but now I am here.'

'You must be punished!' booms one of the statues. 'A broken bone for each second we have been left waiting.'

'We might have stumbled against a chair and fallen,' rumbles the first statue in his gravid tones. 'Not all the stonemasons of the world could have repaired our injuries!'

'Time enough later to punish me, marmoreal lords,' you put in hastily. 'But first, your banquet awaits . . .'

Taking the first statue by the hand, you lead them one at a time to the stone chairs. As you guide the seventh to his seat, however, he touches your head and says mistrustfully: 'You seem rather taller than usual . . .'

If you make an immediate dash for the stairs, turn to **123**

If you keep up the charade hoping to brazen it out, turn to **135**

37

Bursting into Theodosius' cell, you see at once that there is one final guardian to deal with. It is a mechanical hound, fashioned out of interlocking plates of burnished gold. Behind it, Theodosius sits with his wrists fettered by iron shackles. 'Thank heavens you've come!' he cries. 'But beware this strange beast.'

The metal hound makes no attempt to bite you, however, but instead jumps back across the cell and clamps its jaws around Theodosius' throat. As you step closer, it emits a menacing mechanical growl.

This is a sticky situation. If you try to free your master, those golden fangs will rip out his throat! What can you do?

If you were given some *aqua regia* by the nomads and wish to use it, turn to **50**

If you prefer to try a TEMPEST spell, turn to **63**

If you have neither of those, turn to **76**

38

The harpist slumps to the ground, fast asleep. The moment his fingers leave the strings of his harp, the hypnotic spell of the music is broken. The nomads start to shake their heads, dazed and weary after many hours of uncontrollable dancing.

You give the villain no chance to recover. Snatching up a nearby spear, you run him through.

Turn to **119**

39

You have not gone very much further when you think you can see the dawn ahead, spreading like a stream of blood along the distant horizon. As red-gold light spills into the sky, the craggy outlines of the far rim of the Abyss begin to take shape out of the misty blue haze of banished night. Then it is true! There is indeed another land, entirely unknown, far to the east of the world you know. And now you are its discoverer. Heart pounding with eager excitement, you urge the carpet onwards.

Looming ever nearer are the sheer cliffs marking the end of the Abyss. The rising sun sends out shafts of brilliant light, dispelling the vertiginous terror you felt whenever you gazed into the Abyss. Drawing closer to the undiscovered country, you can now make out a thick expanse of jungle completely filling the clifftops. Some of the luxuriant roots and creepers have even dangled down over the edge into the Abyss – where, you are alarmed to note, the drifting mist has corroded and withered them. How fortunate that you did not descend into that mist yourself, for it would surely have spelled your doom.

Then, with firm ground only a few minutes' flight away, something large rises from the treetops and soars towards you. With its leathery black wings

spread against the fiery dawn, it looks like a devil flying out of the flames of hell. At first you take it for a monstrous bat, but as it approaches you see something that sends a shiver of horror through you. The creature has the face of a man . . .

If you call out to speak to the creature, turn to **52**

If you wish to cast a spell, turn to **65**

If you stand ready to do battle, turn to **77**

40

Daylight reaches the forest floor only in thin shards, but you are intensely aware of the hot sun beating constantly down on the canopy of foliage high overhead. The jungle seethes with boiling humidity, and there is the constant whisper of condensation trickling across the thick leaves. After you have gone a hundred paces you are drenched in sweat, and you have to cast off most of your fine clothes of silk and velvet.

You trudge on for league after wearying league. Insects swarm around, revelling in the scent of your sweat, and you curse constantly as you slap them away. A snake, emerald coils wound heavily around the overhanging branch of a tree, raises its head to regard you with the lidless gems that are its eyes. You are ready with a spell, but it allows you to pass unmolested.

Arriving at a glade where the branches spread overhead like a net, you slog forward through a high cluster of ferns and are surprised to feel your feet caught in some sort of entanglement. You pull one of

your feet up out of the ferns, to discover strands of white silk webbing wound around your ankle. How vexing – already tired from hours of walking in the harsh humidity, you now have to trudge through this arduous obstacle into the bargain.

If you have the Lucky Bottle, turn to **53**

If not, turn to **66**

41

Screams ring out again and again as you slash helplessly at the grinning phantom. You realize they are your own screams, born of pure terror.

At last it departs, rushing up the chimney in a swirl of mist, leaving you a sobbing heap in the corner of the hut. Its bony fingers have torn huge chunks out of your flesh: reduce your current BODY score to 1 and note that you will bear the marks of this battle for the rest of your life – your total *maximum* BODY is now only three points, even after magical healing. Also, nightmare memories of its face will haunt your sleep forever more, and you will always be nervous about what might lurk around the next corner. Reduce your MIND score to 2.

The night seems endless. At last you lapse into a stunned half-sleep.

Turn to **91**

42

The woman, whose name is Terpitia, is very happy to have the chance to thank you. She leads you back

to her home, a small farmhouse not far from the river. A few chickens strut around self-importantly, and there is a pig tethered around the side of the house that grunts as it snuffles in the dirt. The inside is homely but welcoming, as you might expect, with strong wooden chairs set before a wide stone hearth.

Watching as you place your belongings in the corner of the room, Terpitia is intrigued by the runes engraved on your dagger. 'So the weapon is enchanted!' she says. 'No doubt that explains the elemental's reluctance to face you.'

You try to explain that the dagger is not exactly magical, but that the runes only distinguish it as an *athame*, or wizard's dagger. Terpitia, however, pays no attention. She turns the dagger over in her hands. 'If you gave me this,' she says suddenly, turning on you with an entreating look, 'I would be safe from the river-elemental. He would never dare to attack me again.'

You consider her request. The monster did retreat from you very rapidly, and it *is* entirely possible that this was because he feared the runes on your dagger. Supernatural creatures are often very wary of wizardry. Though the truth is that these runes have no intrinsic power, the elemental's fear of them would certainly ensure Terpitia's safety. But it would leave you weaponless!

If you agree to let her have your dagger, turn to **55**

If you insist that you must hold on to it, turn to **4**

43

Which of these spells will you cast:

BALL OF FLAME?	Turn to **56**
VEIL OF MIST?	Turn to **69**
TEMPEST?	Turn to **81**

If you have none of these, your only hope is that the phantoms will overlook you – turn to **30**

44

Which of these will you try:

A cloak?	Turn to **82**
A Lucky Bottle?	Turn to **94**

If you have neither of these, you could cast a spell (turn to **57**) or else just attempt to dodge past (turn to **70**)

45

The armour proves to be an empty suit. It is a phenomenon you have encountered before. Doubtless the spirit that inhabited and animated the armour has already gone howling back down to the infernal pit from which it came.

Turn to **6**

46

You try your best to resist the hypnotic call of the music, but to no avail. A vaunting grin spreads across the harpist's narrow features as he sees you start to

tap your feet, then break into a high-stepping tarantella that carries you back and forth across the tent.

You look at the nomads, but they can only return helpless glances as they too are spun uncontrollably by the music. You are horrified by your inability to stop your prancing feet, but the harpist's spell is too strong. You will dance until you drop, slain by exhaustion.

Your adventure has ended in a merry dance indeed.

47

You cannot get a clear shot at the archer as he is hidden behind the narrow slit of the window. Thus there are few attack spells that could be used now. You take stock of the few spells you think might be effective; will it be:

VEIL OF MIST?	Turn to **60**
ROCK SKIN?	Turn to **73**
FIRE OF WRATH?	Turn to **85**

If you have none of these, decide whether you will zigzag towards the gate (turn to **34**), or rush straight for it (turn to **24**)

48

You find steps leading down off the battlements and make your way down to the inner courtyard. You must be wary from now on – you have penetrated the

very stronghold of your enemies, and death might lurk around any corner.

Turn to **145**

49

One at a time, the statues go shuffling to their seats. But one is left standing because you have taken his place.

He looks around with the sightless stone orbs of his eyes. 'Where is my chair?' he growls.

'A stranger may be sitting among us!' thunders the one next to you.

It doesn't occur to them to try counting the chairs. Probably you wouldn't be too clever either, if you had a lump of rock for a brain. Finally the one at the head of the table comes up with an idea, however: 'We will join hands. That way it will soon become obvious if there is an intruder in our midst.'

They all nod slowly as the merit of the plan penetrates their marble skulls. The statues on either side of you thrust out their hands. You must think fast, or be discovered.

If you have the spell ROCK SKIN, turn to **62**

If not, turn to **75**

50

Fumbling for the Lucky Bottle, you accidentally drop it.

Theodosius utters an exasperated gasp. 'Oh, you clumsy oaf!'

The bottle shatters on the stone floor and the *aqua regia* splashes on to the mechanical hound, which gives a startled yelp as its metal hide begins to dissolve. Enraged, it forgets all about Theodosius and launches itself at you with a whirring of gears.

If you were without a dagger, you will be pleased to learn that the broken bottle will serve perfectly well as a weapon.

WAR-DOG: COMBAT 3 BODY 5

The *aqua regia* is still dissolving the war-dog, and it will automatically lose one BODY point each round, whether you hit it or not.

Everything rests on this battle. If you win, turn to **88**

51

Your foe lapses into a sound sleep. You consider killing him now, while he is helpless, but decide against it. You have had enough slaughter to last you a lifetime, and the spell will keep him snoring contentedly while you complete your mission.

Turn to **111**

52

'Wait!' you say, as the bat-thing swoops closer. 'I am a traveller who wishes to visit your land. I mean you no harm.'

'You are food,' it avers by way of contradiction,

opening its mouth to display needle-sharp teeth; 'you are prey. I mean you great harm.'

'Is this rational?' you cry. 'Have you no curiosity about the country from which I come?'

'None,' says the bat-thing. 'There is no land to the west. You are perplexed, possibly mad, and shortly you will be dead.'

If you take the carpet down into the mists of the Abyss to avoid battle, turn to **89**

If you wish to cast a spell, turn to **65**

If you simply draw your dagger and fight, turn to **77**

53

Glancing down as you extricate yourself from a particularly troublesome knot of webbing, your eyes happen to fall on the Lucky Bottle hanging at your belt. Its rounded surface gives a strangely distorted reflection. You smile at the sight of your own comical image, then jump with a thrill of alarm. For a moment it seemed as though something large, black and hairy was illuminated in a shaft of sunlight above you. From the glimpse you got, it had a horrid abundance of legs – and it was descending rapidly towards your back!

To dodge out of the way, you must roll equal to or less than your SPEED score on one dice. (You can of course use SWIFT WIND, if you have it, so as to make this roll succeed automatically – but you must decide

whether or not you're using the spell *before* you roll the dice.)

If you succeed in the roll, turn to **78**

If you fail, turn to **66**

54

With nerves shored up by the spell, you are no longer intimidated by the phantom's grisly smile and haunting bloodlit gaze. It stretches out its thin arms to seize you, but is astonished to see the look of fear vanish from your eyes. It hesitates, its mad screech turning into an uncertain giggle as it stares at you.

You stare back. More than that, you laugh in its face.

This derision is more than the phantom can bear. It retreats from your laughter and is sucked like smoke up the chimney. The last you hear of it is an anguished sigh as it blows away on the night wind.

For the remainder of the night, the phantoms leave your rest undisturbed.

If you have the codeword OPHELIA on your Character Sheet, turn to **79**

If not, turn to **91**

55

Terpitia thanks you effusively as she tucks the dagger into her girdle. Delete the dagger from your Character Sheet, and note that until you get a new weapon you must deduct one point from your COMBAT score.

Do you have both a carpet *and* some strands of cobweb-silk?

If you do, turn to **68**

If you have only one (or neither) of these items, turn to **4**

56

The spell summons a blast of flame from the deepest bowels of your psyche. It hisses in the dank mist as it goes hurtling over the water at the phantoms. One utters a forlorn cry as the fire roars into it, burning away the smoky tendrils of its being. But the others fix you with chilling glares and fall upon you in moments, silently shredding your soul from your flesh.

Your quest has reached a sudden and horrible end.

57

Only two spells strike you as possibly effective in this situation. Which will you use:

VEIL OF MIST? Turn to **106**
SWIFT WIND? Turn to **118**

If you decide against either of those, you can either try dodging past (turn to **70**) or consider the items you are carrying (turn to **44**)

58

You cannot help congratulating yourself on your excellent luck. These horses are among the finest steeds

you have ever seen. Selecting one that seems strong and yet tractable, you ride swiftly out of the camp.

The miles flit by and you have little to do but listen to the drumming of your horse's hoofs on the grassy plain. How pleasant it is to travel in comfort, after the wearying distance you came on foot. You huddle inside your clothes, but despite the chill night wind you allow yourself a smile. Everything is going perfectly.

A sudden shriek penetrates the darkness. The hackles on your neck rise as you slowly recognize the sound. The hunting cry of a basilisk. The very gaze of such a creature can strike a man dead!

If you decide to get rid of your horse, turn to **72**

If you urge it to a gallop, turn to **84**

59

Only an hour after daybreak, you spy a cluster of yellow flowers in the shelter of a low bluff. It is a pleasant and cheering sight after the drab expanse of parched grass you have been trekking through for so long.

You stop to pluck a few of the flowers, which you identify as fennel. Do you have the codeword OPHELIA on your Character Sheet?

If so, turn to **108**

If not, turn to **120**

60

No trace of you can be seen under the layer of shimmering mist that spreads miraculously to cover

the dusty ground in front of the citadel. Moving rapidly but quietly, you scurry up the path towards the gate. You can see the archer at his window, lips contorted in an anxious frown as he scans the area to no avail. He wastes two arrows shooting at nothing, but by that time you are safely in the shelter of the gatehouse.

You press yourself against the huge oaken gate. The portico hides you from the archer's line of sight – not that he could very well shoot directly downwards anyway – and so you let the mist disperse. Here you can relax in safety while you consider how to gain entry to the citadel.

Then you notice the murder holes set into the roof of the portico. These are the openings for drainage channels, through which can be poured ordure, boiling water or even acid. Now you see that you must act quickly to find your way past the gate. Once the murder holes start to discharge their dreadful contents, it will be too late.

Turn to **97**

61

The moment you look over the lip of the well, you are transfixed by an eerie sight. A horde of spectral bodiless heads are floating up the shaft of the wellway towards you – each with eyes glowing like luminous emeralds, long teeth gnashing in bloodless gums. Their necks end in a ragged stump from which hangs a hideous knot of writhing entrails.

All of this is enough to fill the bravest heart with horror. But there is something else that terrifies you most of all. The heads are rising towards you in total silence.

If you want to use a spell, turn to **98**

If you stand your ground ready to fight, turn to **86**

62

By virtue of the spell, your own hands feel just like theirs.

'No, there is no-one here but us,' intones the leader.

'Then my chair is missing!' declares the statue who is still standing up.

'Find that indolent henchman,' says one of the others ponderously. 'He will suffer a thousand deaths if he has failed in his duties.'

The statue whose chair you have taken stares blindly along the table. 'And in the meantime, am I to stand?'

'Take my seat, brother,' you say, forcing a baritone rumble into your voice. 'I shall take the keys and go looking for our negligent henchman.'

There is a general murmur of agreement, sounding rather like a landslide in a quarry. 'Give him a solid drubbing,' the leader tells you. 'Pound him until he screams.'

'Grind his bones to powder!' cries the seventh statue, pouring himself a goblet of fine silt and draining it with apparent relish.

'I shall see to it that he never shirks in his duties again,' you call back as you stride over to the spiral staircase.

Note on your Character Sheet that you have the bunch of keys, then turn to **11**

63

'No!' cries Theodosius. But he is too late. You have already uttered the syllables of the spell.

A miniature storm-cloud appears around the mechanical dog. There is a blue flash as lightning discharges through its metal body. Straight into your master.

Theodosius gives a scream as the lightning electrocutes him. The dog, seeing that it no longer has a living prisoner to guard, bites out his throat and then leaps at you.

Your own rash action cost Theodosius his life, but you have no time to think about that now. You must fight for your life.

WAR-DOG: COMBAT 3 BODY 5

If you win, turn to **100**

64

The spriggan curls up into a tangle of thorny limbs and winds its barbed tail around itself, emitting a rasping purr like the sound a cat might make – if you stuck it through a meat grinder, that is.

Gingerly you reach out and pick up the sleeping spriggan.

Turn to **129**

65

Which of the following will you try:

BALL OF FLAME?	Turn to **125**
VEIL OF MIST?	Turn to **137**
TEMPEST?	Turn to **2**
SLEEP?	Turn to **101**

If you decide against using any of these, turn to **77**

66

The attercob, a spider the size of a wolf, lands on you with a soft thud. You feel the rasping of coarse bristles as its mandibles close on your unprotected flesh.

ATTERCOB: COMBAT 4 BODY 3

This creature's bite can be fatal. Each time it wounds you, roll a dice; on a roll of 6 you are killed instantly. Fleeing is out of the question, with your feet snared by strands of cobweb.

If you win, turn to **90**

67

The spell erupts into a blossom of flame. You cannot tell if it discomfits the phantom, but it certainly

ignites the timbers of the hut. Within seconds you are engulfed in an inferno. Fire surrounds you, scorching your hair and searing your skin. You stumble about, searching for the old man, but he is lost in the smoke and it is hopeless. Finally, unable to stand the heat any longer, you rush out of the hut and plunge off into the forest. Your clothes are on fire, but luckily you find a stream and you roll in it until the flames are quenched. Feebly you manage to drag yourself a little further, and by some miracle the night-phantoms do not pursue you. At last, overcome by the smoke you have inhaled and by the pain of your burns, you lapse into unconsciousness.

Roll one dice. This is the number of BODY points you lose.

If you survive, you awaken after daybreak and limp back to the hut. It is now only a smoking shell of charred wood and ash. You have lost all your possessions except for your dagger. At least you are more fortunate than the old man; he didn't even get out with his life.

In sombre mood, you turn your face to the east and set off down into the valley.

Turn to **103**

68

You amuse yourself with a stroll around the farmyard while Terpitia completes a few chores. A little while later, she emerges from the house carrying something under her arm.

'What do you think?' she says, beaming as she holds it up: a long cloak.

'The design is familiar . . .' you say, scratching your head.

She laughs. 'Of course! I made it out of that old rug you had, and sewed it together with the silk. Try it on.'

You don the cloak. It is comfortable and will undoubtedly stand you in good stead in the event of rain or cold weather. Since the carpet had lost its magic anyway, you are probably better off with the cloak. (Cross the carpet and strands of cobweb-silk off the items listed on your Character Sheet, replacing them with the cloak.)

You thank Terpitia for her thoughtfulness. She curtsies as a joke and then goes running off back to the house to prepare supper.

Turn to **4**

69

Mist envelops you like a cape, spreading out around the boat in a swirling mass of chill whiteness.

Normally the spell renders you invisible to your foes. In this case, it has an even better effect. Seeing an eerily fog-draped figure ahead of them, the phantoms stare spectrally across the water, mistaking you for another of their kind.

'Are there mortals in that boat?' enquires one, its translucent tongue dragging across bloodless lips.

'There was one,' you reply in your best attempt at doom-laden tones. 'The soul was most succulent.'

Mournfully, the phantoms turn and glide silently away across the water. You breathe a sigh of relief before rowing as fast as you can to the far shore.

Turn to **140**

70

Roll one dice. You are trying to roll equal to or less than your SPEED score.

If you succeed, turn to **118**

If you fail, turn to **130**

71

Do you have the codeword STROMKARL on your Character Sheet?

If so, turn to **83**

If not, turn to **95**

72

Dismounting, you give the horse a slap on the rump which sends it galloping off across the plain. A shame to lose such an admirable steed, but you would rather continue on foot than face the dreaded basilisk. No doubt it will chase the horse, preferring a good feast of horseflesh to the scrawny morsel that you would provide.

You hear another screech and the rustle of giant feathers far off in the dusk. While the basilisk hunts

the horse, you slink quickly away in the other direction.

Turn to **107**

73

Your body rendered all but impervious to harm, you lumber up the rocky path towards the citadel.

Outlined at his high window, the archer draws a bead on you and sends an arrow hurtling down from the walls. It snaps against your stone-hard flesh, chipping away a faint scratch. You ignore the twinge of pain and continue on towards the gate.

Another arrow hits you. And another. In spite of your toughened skin, you still suffer the loss of one BODY point. But you know that without the spell you would probably have been torn to shreds by this barrage of shots.

If you survive to reach the gatehouse, you can let the spell drop. Here, hidden from the archer's view by the jutting portico, you can take the time to examine the huge barred gate and hopefully think of a way to get inside.

Your eyes stray up to the roof of the portico, where you notice a row of small holes. These are a common feature in castles. The defenders use them to sluice down any number of substances upon enemies at the gate, ranging from the merely disgusting to the instantly fatal. Boiling oil is a favourite: you have seen it scald men down to raw bones within seconds.

A fate like that is worth hurrying yourself to avoid.

With a sense of urgency, you turn your attention to gaining entry.

Turn to **97**

74

It happens without warning, without a sound. You are standing in front of the door, running your fingers over the odd coat-of-arms, steeling yourself to open it and face whatever lies beyond, when attack comes from an unexpected direction – right behind you. You gasp as fangs sink into your neck. Lose one BODY point. If you survive, you are already summoning up your sorcery as you whirl to deal with this unforeseen threat. But when you set eyes on what has attacked you, you stand for a moment in the frozen grip of fear.

A group of disembodied heads hang hovering in the air of the vestibule. Their eyes blaze greenly from deep-set white sockets and their long fangs are bared eagerly in anticipation of the blood-feast. But most ghastly of all is the tangle of slimy entrails which hangs from the stump of each severed neck, twitching and coiling like snakes as the disembodied heads circle around you.

FIRST PENANGGA-LAN:	COMBAT 5 BODY 1
SECOND PENANGGA-LAN:	COMBAT 5 BODY 1
THIRD PENANGGA-LAN:	COMBAT 5 BODY 1
FOURTH PENANGGA-LAN:	COMBAT 5 BODY 1
FIFTH PENANGGA-LAN:	COMBAT 5 BODY 1
SIXTH PENANGGA-LAN:	COMBAT 5 BODY 1

You have no chance of fleeing; they are all around you. Fight on with as best you can. If you win, turn to **110**

75

The game is up. There is nothing for it but to fight these lumbering stone men. This is a battle you will be lucky to win without cheating.

FIRST STATUE:	COMBAT 1	BODY 3
SECOND STATUE:	COMBAT 1	BODY 3
THIRD STATUE:	COMBAT 1	BODY 3
FOURTH STATUE:	COMBAT 1	BODY 3
FIFTH STATUE:	COMBAT 1	BODY 3
SIXTH STATUE:	COMBAT 1	BODY 3
SEVENTH STATUE:	COMBAT 1	BODY 3

If you flee up the spiral stairs (which are too narrow for them to follow), turn to **11**

If you surrender, turn to **92**

If by some miracle you actually beat them, turn to **87**

76

You are aghast, horror-struck . . . To have come so far, overcome so many dangers, only to falter now.

'Sorry, master,' you say, shaking your head. 'There's nothing I can do.'

'You blithering imbecile!' he rages. 'You've come all this way, and now you tell me that?'

'Is there no way? Perhaps I could try again . . .' you suggest.

Theodosius nods. 'You'll have to, won't you. Find your way back to the manse and use a time-travel spell to go back a fortnight. That way you'll get another chance.'

As you are leaving the cell, he shouts after you: '. . . And get it *right* this time!'

If you decide to go back in time as he suggested, return to the start and try the adventure again.

77

With a shrill cry, it drops on to the airborne carpet and folds its leathery pinions around you, claws raking your flesh and sharp fangs seeking your throat.

VESPERTILE: COMBAT 4 BODY 2

Since it is grappling you so closely, spell-casting is now out of the question: there would be as much danger to yourself as to the vespertile. Also there is no way to flee from it, as it would simply fly after you and attack again.

If you defeat the vespertile, turn to **101**

78

You jump aside just in time to avoid the falling bulk of a giant spider. It lands in the centre of the glade with a soft plop and squats there, glaring at you with

liquid black eyes. Your nerves stand on edge and every muscle in your body goes tense, anticipating immediate attack, but the spider-creature appears unwilling to pursue you beyond the bounds of its web.

Backing cautiously away, you happen to brush a few long strands of cobweb-silk from a branch at the edge of the glade. Wound into a coil, these would count as one item of encumbrance if you wish to take them with you.

Decide if you are doing that, then turn to **102**

79

The sun rises spectacularly, casting a glorious golden radiance over the lush river valley to the east. You go outside and breathe in grateful gulps of the fresh morning air. The scene goes a long way towards dispelling the horrors of the last night.

Sakai shares a breakfast of rice cakes with you. As you get ready to set out on your quest, he thanks you for saving his life. 'I must head south from here,' he says, 'but I have travelled through the country you are heading into, so I know a bit that might be useful. Should you meet the nomad barbarians of the plains, I advise you not to try stealing a horse from them, whatever else you do. You see, they consider horse-theft the most heinous crime of all. Furthermore, atop a crag somewhere on those same plains lies the Academy of Mysteries. It is said that a man may become a master of sorcery there – but you must

keep your wits about you, for the tuition is overseen by the great Fiend himself.' Sakai scratches his head. 'Now, is there anything I've overlooked . . . ?'

You are keen to be on your way. You shake hands and, wishing the old fellow farewell, you set off down into the valley.

'Oh yes!' Sakai calls after you. 'Make sure to pick some fennel if you see any. It's very good for instilling COURAGE!'

The silly old duffer – there was no need to shout. You give him a last cheery wave and then turn your face to the east, whistling as you go.

Turn to **103**

80

Recalling Terpitia's tale of magical harps, you plug your ears with the waxy residue. This is a rather revolting procedure, in view of the rank smell of the stuff, but it is preferable to being ensorcelled by malevolent music.

Then, ears firmly stoppered, you push aside the tent flap. Within you see the whole tribe of nomads cavorting insanely to the strains of a harp. The harp is being played by a ferret-faced traveller in ermine robes.

To judge from the look on the nomads' faces, they would like to kill the harpist if they could stop dancing long enough to reach for their weapons. Since you cannot hear a thing, you are completely unaffected by the music. In fact you rather relish the

look of baffled alarm on the harpist's face as you stride across the tent towards him.

EVIL HARPIST: COMBAT 3 BODY 1

It hardly seems credible you would wish to flee from this puny fellow, but if you do, turn to **107**

If you kill him, turn to **119**

81

The phantoms are engulfed in the storm summoned up by your magic. Their screams are like the distant soughing of the night-wind. Helpless against the spell, they are torn into creeping tendrils of fog, blown off across the water, and dispersed.

You sigh with relief. No doubt such malignant spirits will eventually reform, coalescing again out of the chill lake mists to imperil other travellers who pass this way. But at least you will be long gone by then.

Bending over the oars, you row rapidly to the further shore. Turn to **140**

82

Swirling the cloak like a bullfighter's cape, you dash towards the door.

The hand, groping blindly through the floor-boards, feels the brush of cloth and seizes the cloak tightly. You hear a triumphant cry from under your feet.

You reply with a laugh of your own, releasing the cloak and running out into the courtyard – while the thing beneath the floor, realizing it has been tricked, gives vent to snarls of terrible rage.

Turn to **142**

83

Are you carrying a quantity of burnt spriggan (a waxy residue)?

If you have collected such an item, turn to **80**

If not, turn to **95**

84

A bizarre beast comes bounding after you, easily gaining on the horse. It resembles a giant cockerel with reptilian legs and a long scaly tail like a lizard's.

Whinnying in fright, your horse turns its head and is instantly struck down by the basilisk's terrible gaze. As the horse drops, you go flying over its shoulders to land on the sward with stunning impact. Lose one BODY point.

If you survive, you scramble desperately to your feet despite the jarring pain in your leg. You think you must have sprained your ankle, but you cannot let that bother you now. The basilisk is upon you!

BASILISK: COMBAT 3 BODY 4

At the start of every round you must roll a dice, and on a roll of 6 you accidentally catch sight of the basilisk's eyes, which will kill you at once.

Fleeing would be pointless; soon it will be pitch dark, and the basilisk would soon outdistance you. If you kill it, turn to **96**

85

Flame uncoils from your fingers like a serpent, to go twisting off through the air towards the archer. Foolishly he wastes time loosing off an arrow at it. He would have done better to run – the arrow is simply charred in flight by your fiery spell, which then streaks up through the narrow window and proceeds to burn the life out of the hapless archer. His screams are mercifully brief.

Record the codeword IMMOLATE on your Character Sheet.

You approach the tall oak gate of the citadel, noting with interest the row of murder holes built into the roof of the portico. Had you simply run up here, even if you had dodged his arrows, then the archer could have poured boiling oil on you through the murder holes. All in all, you are confident that you made the best use of your sorcery.

Now you must decide whether to use more magic to gain entry to the citadel.

Turn to **97**

86

No-one could question your courage. Faced by creatures out of the sheer pit of nightmare, you remain undaunted. As they come gliding up out of

the well – still without the slightest sound – you are ready to sell your life dearly.

FIRST PENANGGA-LAN:	COMBAT 5 BODY 1
SECOND PENANGGA-LAN:	COMBAT 5 BODY 1
THIRD PENANGGA-LAN:	COMBAT 5 BODY 1
FOURTH PENANGGA-LAN:	COMBAT 5 BODY 1
FIFTH PENANGGA-LAN:	COMBAT 5 BODY 1
SIXTH PENANGGA-LAN:	COMBAT 5 BODY 1

You could never hope to flee; they are all around you. Fight on with all your skill and, if you win, turn to **110**

87

The floor is littered with broken chunks of stone. Sculpted faces stare up at you, impassive and unmoving. Marble limbs lie still, sundered from cracked torsos. The Seven Statues will not walk again.

Searching amid the rubble, you find the bunch of keys. Now you must find your master. You hurry up the spiral stairs.

Turn to **11**

88

With a final clanking of gears, the metal dog slumps to the floor and lies still.

'Well done!' says Theodosius. 'Now, you'd better

get these blasted chains off me, and we'll quit this place without delay.'

Do you have a bunch of keys?

If so, turn to **148**

If not, turn to **76**

89

The mist seems almost to reach up for you. Dank choking tendrils of miasma surround you, filling your lungs with a ghastly chill. You feel as though you have plunged into a pool of icy marsh-water.

Above you, the vespertilė thinks better of pursuing its prey into the noxious atmosphere of the Abyss. Emitting a shrill vexed cry, it wheels about and flaps back to its jungle abode.

You wait until it is safely out of sight before ascending again out of the cover of the mist. By this time you have been thoroughly chilled, and it is as though some of your very life-essence has seeped out of you along with your body heat. Roll one dice; this is the number of BODY points you must lose.

If you still live, you lie shivering on the hovering carpet until the sun has restored a little of your spirits, then continue your journey to the far edge of the Abyss.

Turn to **113**

90

Almost sobbing with disgust, you stand over the twitching carcass of the attercob. Ghastly ichor oozes

from its wounds and leaves a coating of slime on your dagger. With a grimace, you stagger to the edge of the glade and find some wide palm-leaves with which to wipe the weapon clean.

As you do this, you happen to brush a few long strands of cobweb-silk from a branch. If you wound these into a coil you could take them with you; they would count as one item of encumbrance. You could also carry one of the large leaves which, folded up, would count as one item.

Note down if you are taking the cobweb-silk and/or the palm-leaf, then turn to **102**

91

You wake to find the first rays of dawn slanting through the window. The old man is no better. He gives a weak moan as you raise his head to give him a little water. You cannot be sure that he managed to swallow any of it.

You rise to your feet and look down at him sadly. There is nothing you can do for him (at any rate, nothing that you're *willing* to do for him) and so you gather your things and make ready to set out. Perhaps someone else will come this way who can tend to his wounds. If not, you don't see how he can survive another night.

You shrug and turn to head east, down into the river valley.

Turn to **103**

92

Taking hold of you in unbreakable grasps, they first crush your ankles to prevent you running away. Then they pound your head against the table until you have forgotten every spell you ever knew.

'Now *you* will be our henchman,' rumbles the leader of the statues.

'Fill our goblets with the best vintage silt,' says one.

'Bring me a bowl of fresh pebbles, and be sure to garnish them with the most succulent mortar,' commands another.

'Boil me a fossil egg, and be sure to warm some stalactites for dipping in it,' is yet another request.

You crawl off miserably to see to your new duties. You strove to become a hero, but you have only achieved the position of scullion to a group of living statues. A sad failure, though a brave attempt.

93

Shortly after midnight, there is a dry scraping noise. A grinning little spriggan emerges from the brickwork behind the hearth and goes creeping on tiptoe towards your belongings.

You sit up indignantly and swipe at it. It leaps like a startled cat and scuttles back into a corner, thorn-sharp fingers raised to fight back.

SPRIGGAN: COMBAT 5 BODY 1

It will mean abandoning your belongings if you

flee out into the night – turn to **117** if you decide to do that.

If you kill the spriggan, turn to **129**

94

You do the only thing you can think of: smashing the Lucky Bottle and driving the jagged glass stem into the hand.

But the Evil One's skin is like leather, and the coarse hair covering his arm proves impervious to your attack. A cry of exaltation wells up from under the floor as he catches hold of you.

Turn to **130**

95

You creep up to the tent and peek inside. The moment you push the tent flap aside, the music sweeps out with full force, threatening to engulf your senses. It is all you can do to keep from lifting your feet in a lively jig – but you are still bone-weary and footsore from your long day's march, and quite possibly that is what saves you.

Inside the tent, you can see the whole nomad tribe gathered, dancing with mad abandon to the music. Your gaze goes to the only one not dancing: the harpist himself. His narrow face is scrunched up in a malicious grin as he watches the victims of his sorcerous music.

Judging from the look on the nomads' faces, they would kill the harpist in a trice, if only they could

stop dancing long enough to draw their swords. Now you must decide whether to intervene, or to back away before the magic begins to affect you too.

If you just charge in to attack the harpist, turn to **143**

If you make use of a spell, turn to **131**

If you leave the tent and continue across the plains on foot, turn to **107**

If you take advantage of the nomads' predicament to steal one of their horses, turn to **58**

96

At last, with a ghastly rattle in its throat, the basilisk rolls back and dies. Even in death, its gaze is dangerous and you back quickly away from the corpse.

Again the pain stabs up your leg. You have indeed twisted your ankle. Reduce your SPEED by one point. Hobbling and cursing, you set out across the plain.

Turn to **107**

97

There are only three ways of getting into the citadel.

If you decide to cast the GENIE spell, turn to **109**

If you want to use PASS THROUGH ROCK, turn to **121**

If you intend to scale the citadel walls, turn to **133**

98

Which of these spells will you try:

BALL OF FLAME? Turn to **122**

TEMPEST? Turn to **134**
SWIFT WIND? Turn to **146**

If you don't have any of these left to use, turn to **86**

99

Your suspicions are confirmed a moment later, when a hideous hunchback appears around the newel of the stairway and launches himself at you with an enraged snarl.

HUNCHBACK: COMBAT 3 BODY 2

It would be dangerous to turn and flee – he could just leap down on you.

If you defeat him, you can continue up the stairs by turning to **111**

100

You have won a bitter victory, since your old master lies dead on the floor beside the body of the mechanical dog. You wonder how you can ever atone for his death.

As you trudge sadly back out of the citadel, you realize that, although you cannot bring Theodosius back from the dead, you can at least try to live your life in a way that would have made him proud. Even though you have failed in this quest, you must always strive towards a glorious future. That is the way of Heroes.

101

The bat-creature drops down into the shroud of mist that perpetually fills the Abyss. You watch as it dwindles and is finally lost from sight. The fog and darkness close around it like pond water around a stone. The undiscovered country lies ahead, but it is the void-brimmed gulf below from which there is truly no returning. Satisfied that you have put an end to your strange adversary, you urge your carpet on towards the far side of the Abyss.

Turn to **113**

102

Following the course of a brook, you make your way onwards throughout the stiflingly hot afternoon. Hacking at creepers with your dagger, you eventually emerge from the jungle to see a landscape of lightly wooded hills descending into a broad valley. By this time it is almost nightfall, and you are very tired. You need rest before you can continue your adventure. Fortunately there is a little wooden hut just ahead of you, at the edge of the forest.

As you approach the hut, you pass a stone water-trough which is fed by fresh water from the brook. If you have the Lucky Bottle with you, you could fill it from the trough. Make a note if you decide to do that (it would still count as just one item of encumbrance).

Stepping into the hut, you see an old man sprawled on the floorboards. He gives a pitiful groan. As you

bend closer in the gathering dusk, you find that his leg has been horribly mauled. The sweat of sickness soaks his clothes. Probably he fell prey to a wild animal but somehow escaped and managed to drag himself here. You moisten his lips with a little water from the trough, but he remains feverish and seems unaware of you.

The ony way to help him would be to use a curative spell – either WATER OF HEALING or HEAL BODY. If you decide to do that, cross the spell off your list and turn to **114**

If you decide to conserve your magic for later use, turn to **126**

103

You walk until mid-afternoon, when you come upon a stream. You follow this and after a while it joins a river. The shadows are now growing long and the sun is dipping towards the hills behind you. You gaze along the river. There is no dwelling in sight where you might beg a night's lodging. In fact you have seen no sign of another person all day.

It looks as though you will be sleeping under the stars tonight. The prospect hardly fills you with joy.

If you have the Lucky Bottle, turn to **128**

If not, turn to **115**

104

Accepting the items, the ferryman urges you to get aboard without delay. 'I do not wish to get caught out

on the lake after nightfall,' he explains as he punts out from the shore. 'I am not sure of the talisman's effectiveness then.'

Peering off into the mist, you strain to make out some sign of the phantoms he spoke of. You can see nothing. Did he tell the truth, or have you just been gulled by a clever trickster? You will never know.

Setting you down on the far side of the lake, the ferryman pushes off from the shore and heads back across with all despatch, his stick-like limbs a flurry of agitation as he punts away. You watch until he disappears behind a white bank of fog, then turn and continue on your way.

Turn to **140**

105

The hearth is inhabited by a cunning spriggan, which first ensures your deep sleep by means of a spell, then creeps out of the brickwork and rifles through your belongings. All through this, despite the spriggan's gleeful cackling, you snore soundly on.

At dawn you awake to find all your possessions gone. (Remember that if this means you have now lost your dagger, you must now reduce your COMBAT score by one point.) Cursing, but with no way of laying your hands on the culprit, you make ready to set out.

Turn to **141**

106

The spell hides you from view, but it is not enough to escape whoever – or *what*ever – lurks beneath the floor. As you run for the door, the creak of the floorboards gives away your position. Again the grotesque hand thrusts up, and this time it catches hold of you.

Turn to **130**

107

Wending your way through the thickening darkness, you at last decide you must rest. Huddling against the flat ground, you shiver in the unrelenting wind and at last fall into an exhausted slumber.

You awaken to a grey dawn, cramped and cold. Lose one BODY point owing to exposure and one SPEED point owing to blisters. If you are still able to go on, you rise to your feet with a groan and slump wearily into the east.

Turn to **59**

108

Recalling old Sakai's parting words, you suddenly understand what he was telling you. Trusting to his herbalist's knowledge, you chew up the fennel-flowers.

They have a miraculous effect: you acquire the COURAGE spell. Add this spell to your list. (If you had it already, you can now cast it twice instead of once.)

Turn to **132**

109

A whirlwind comes screeching up through the hills behind you, whipping up dust and pebbles. As it reaches you, it subsides to reveal an imposing figure. Gold and rubies glitter against his rich brown skin, and a turban of green silk rests on his brow. Muscles ripple as he raises his mighty arms in salaam and bows to you. 'God be with you, O Master of Magic and Grammerie!' he intones in a booming thunderclap of a voice.

'And with you, most loyal servant,' you reply. 'I pray you now, open these gates that bar my way.'

'Your words are second only to the laws of Heaven, O Fount of Excellent Wisdom!' he replies. Bending towards the gate, he strains with every fibre of his massive strength.

There is a creak. The thick oak doors bow inwards under the pressure.

Sweat breaks out on the genie's brow. 'Never have I known such a task . . .' he says. 'It would challenge the king of djinn.'

'Is it beyond your ability?' you ask, anxious in case you have wasted the spell.

'Never!' declares the genie – and, mingling with the roar of his voice, you hear a loud splintering as the gates fly open.

Dismissing the genie, you step forward into the citadel.

Turn to **145**

110

You continue onwards through the door and quietly draw it closed behind you.

You are in a long hall. Gonfalons, each bearing the emblem of seven black stars, hang from the tips of lances set in brackets along the wall; they stir languidly in the draught that moves along the hall after you have closed the door. Dust covers every surface, including the great stone table that dominates the centre of the room. Set around this table are seven stone seats, and in front of each seat is a stone goblet.

At the back of the hall is a darkened archway. Off to one side, in the far corner, a spiral staircase leads to the upper floors of the keep.

A voice resounds from beyond the archway; it is like the rumbling of rocks: 'Come, brothers. It is time for our repast.'

Heavy footsteps shake the floor. Seven stony pairs of feet tread the flagstones. You might just have time to reach the staircase before they get here.

If you run over to the stairs, turn to **11**

If you conceal yourself behind a gonfalon and wait for them, turn to **23**

111

At the top of the stairs is a door.

You glance over your shoulder, only to find that the stairs have vanished behind you! There is just a circular shaft leading far down to the ground floor

of the citadel. There is no turning back now.

'Who's there?' cries a voice from the other side of the door. It is your master, Theodosius. At last you have found him!

You try the handle and discover the door to be locked.

'The cell is lined with silver,' calls Theodosius from the other side of the door. That means you cannot get in with PASS THROUGH ROCK.

If you have a bunch of keys, then you can unlock the door (or you could use the GENIE spell if you have it).

If you can get the door open, turn to **37**

If you have neither the item nor the spell you need, then your adventure ends here. You came within a whisker of saving your master, but in the end you failed him – and now you cannot even save yourself . . .

112

Huddled against the noxious chill, you descend into a small paved square surrounded by overhanging buildings. Eternal twilight shrouds the streets. Lamps sputter on high posts, casting a dim sulphurous glimmer on the mist-dampened cobblestones.

A passer-by shambles towards you, face stark and ashen in the streetlight. 'Where have you come from?' he asks in a hollow voice.

'From the west,' you tell him. 'And what is this place?'

'We call it Nifelheim,' he says.

Another man passes, quiet as a cat, bare feet padding on the slick stones. He is pushing a handcart.

If you ask what is on the cart, turn to **124**

If you ask if they know anything about your master, turn to **136**

If you leave to fly on across the Abyss, turn to **39**

113

It is with a feeling of overwhelming relief that you clear the lip of the chasm at last. You are still flying at breakneck speed hundreds of feet above the ground – a sensation that most mortals would find disconcerting – but at least you no longer have the black mist-laden infinity of the Abyss beneath you.

The carpet drops lower over the jungle canopy, and now you can see monkeys staring up in amazement from amid the lush foliage. Brightly-plumed parrots, terrified at your approach, launch themselves from the branches with shrieking cries. Sunrise sends up wave after wave of steaming bloom-scented heat from the thick green tangle of the rainforest. It is sweltering, but a welcome change after the bone-chilling mists that hung above the chasm.

Crossing the Abyss took you all night, but you are hardly tired at all. You are sustained by your excitement at beholding this unknown and unmapped continent.

The magic carpet brushes the tops of the highest trees, rustling the heavy leaves. An instant later you feel a jolt as, hurtling onwards, it catches momentarily on the end of a branch. You glance around, realizing that the treetops are now all around you. The magic carpet is losing altitude!

If you urge it higher, turn to **15**

If you decide to land immediately, turn to **27**

114

Note the codeword OPHELIA on your Character Sheet.

Your spell miraculously cures the old man's appalling injuries. His eyelids flutter open and he sits up, clutching at your shoulder in amazement. 'What happened to the bajang?' he says. 'One moment it was sinking its teeth in my leg, the next . . .' He stares at his leg, jaw agape, unable to fathom why it bears not so much as a scratch.

'Obviously you got away from the bajang,' you tell him in a soothing voice (though not knowing what a bajang is). 'You're safe now.'

Seeing the last glimmer of twilight through the window of the hut, he leaps to his feet. 'Safe? Not a bit of it!' he cries. 'I've lost my pouch of salt, which means we must be very careful when the hantu arrive – as they surely will now the sun has set.'

'What are the hantu?' you ask him. 'And who are you, come to that?'

Exchanging introductions, you learn that his name

is Sakai and he is some sort of friar in this land. He seems to be full of local folklore, including the legend of the hantu which occupies his attention at the moment. You glean that the hantu are ghosts that frequent out-of-the-way places and enjoy terrifying the living. The story seems almost quaint until Sakai makes it clear that the victim of a hantu is usually quite literally scared to death.

'On no account set foot outside the hut until dawn,' cautions Sakai. 'Also, do not put anything over the threshold. To do so draws the attention of the hantu, and then we would both be doomed.'

You agree to his stipulations just to set his mind at rest. Then, since you are both exhausted, you settle down for the night.

Hours later you awaken. The darkness outside is full of a sinister silence. For a moment you wonder why you find it so disquieting, and then it strikes you. The silence is total; you cannot hear even the chirruping of insects.

Steel your nerves, then turn to **3**

115

You go on a little further and eventually find a high flat-topped boulder beside the stream. It will be uncomfortable, but safer than sleeping on the ground when you have no idea what predators are at large in this strange country. You fetch moss and turf to fashion a bed, then clamber up on to the boulder and settle down for the night.

You are woken once, in the small hours. The moon hangs bright above you, the air so clear and still that you almost imagine you could reach out and touch it.

A howl pierces the night. Perhaps a wolf. Safe on your boulder, you listen to the splashing of the river and it slowly lulls you back to sleep.

The next morning, after a bitingly cold bath in the stream, you breakfast on duck's eggs and berries and then press on towards your goal.

Turn to **12**

116

Ignoring the ferryman's warnings, you clamber into the old rowboat and push off from the shore.

Out on the lake, the pall of fog deadens the splash of the oars so that everything is eerily quiet. You press on, the cold mist stinging your lungs, until you hear ghastly voices come whispering across the water.

At once you stop rowing and throw yourself to the bottom of the boat. Crouching there, you peek over the side and see three phantasmal figures come drifting closer out of the mist. They are translucent and silvery – seemingly formed out of the mist itself – with distinct upper bodies but only a floating cloud of fog where their legs should be.

One of them turns shadowy eyes in your direction. 'Behold that boat yonder,' it says in a sepulchral voice, raising its misty hand to point.

'Let us go closer,' intones another of the three.

'Yes,' agrees the third hollowly. 'There may be mortal souls for us to feast on . . .'

They veer towards your boat, legless torsos skimming the water on layers of white mist. Will you cast a spell (turn to **43**), or remain in hiding (turn to **30**)?

117

You run headlong out into the night. Behind you, the spriggan's gleeful chortling is soon carried away on the wind. Shivering, you hunch against the wind and trudge on until you find a mossy log to shelter behind.

Before morning you are chilled to the marrow. Your clothes are crawling with woodlice and, when you wake, you are disgusted to find a worm inside your boot. Stiff and hungry, you have reason to curse your own timidity as much as the spriggan's malice.

Remember to delete all the items you were carrying (and if the lost items included your dagger, remember to also reduce your COMBAT score by one point). Then turn to **141**

118

With a burst of speed, you dodge away from the clutching hand and rush outside into the courtyard.

Turn to **142**

119

The harpist lies dead at your feet, his music silenced forever. The nomads, now free of the spell that kept

them dancing, step forward cautiously. Their swords are in their hands. Only when you turn over the harpist's corpse with your foot, revealing the staring sightless gaze of death, do they relax their wary postures.

'It is a cleaner fate than the cur deserved,' growls the nomad chieftain, sheathing his sword. 'He came among us as guest and shared our supper, then offered to give us a tune on his harp by way of repayment. Little did we know what an enticing melody he would play.'

You shrug. 'An invidious fellow indeed. But he will spoil no more evenings with his music now.'

'It is good,' declares the chieftain with a nod. 'We thank you, and you may stay with us tonight.'

You sleep comfortably in one of the felt tents, protected from the chilly wind howling across the plain. In the morning you enjoy a fine meal of spiced porridge with the nomads, and can restore one BODY point if wounded.

If you still have the Lucky Bottle, turn to **144**

If not, turn to **9**

120

Record on your Character Sheet that you now have a bunch of fennel-flowers. They count as one item for encumbrance purposes.

Now turn to **132**

121

The spell makes you as insubstantial as a ghost, allowing you to slip through the solid granite masonry of the walls. The sensation is eerie – like passing out of bright sunshine into an icy block of shadow for an instant. Emerging on the other side of the wall, you cancel the spell and look around you.

Turn to **145**

122

Your use of the spell is well-judged. Closely bunched in the narrow wellway, the vampire heads can do nothing to escape the blast. The fiery mass drops down among them, carrying them back down into the bowels of the citadel crypt. Even as they burn, though their mouths open as if to scream, they still emit no sound.

Turn to **110**

123

Try to roll your SPEED score or less on one dice.

Success means that you race up the spiral staircase, which is too narrow for the living statues to pursue you; turn to **11**

Failure means that they seize you; turn to **92**

124

The other man stops and turns to you, gazing with dull eyes. 'They are bones of fingers,' he says after a

pause. He lifts the canvas covering on his cart and you see it is full of finger bones.

'Dead men's fingers,' puts in the other man when he sees your quizzical look. 'We are building a ship out of them, to be called the *Night Farer*. It will sail across the void, skimming the surface of the mist, taking us back to the world of men.'

You are almost tempted to laugh. 'But to construct such a ship out of fingers would take ages!'

They nod in wistful agreement. 'Already we have laboured for three millenia on the project,' announces a third man as he goes shuffling past.

If you ask if anyone has heard news of your master, turn to **136**

If you are keen to quit this creepy scene, turn to **147**

125

You hurriedly recite the spell and a ball of roaring fire erupts from your mouth, crackling and hissing in the dank lacy mist that hangs eternally above the Abyss. It goes spinning towards the bat-monster, which claws the air with its dingy grey wings in a frantic effort to dodge.

Because the dampness of the mist will serve to partially extinguish the flames, the creature can avoid injury on a roll of 1–3 on the dice. After rolling for this, turn to **77** (and deduct one BODY point from the creature if it failed to evade your spell).

Outside, the last traces of the day fade rapidly from the sky, which soon changes from indigo to utter black. It is a clear night and the stars appear like tiny pearls on a cushion of velvet. Yawning, you settle yourself down for a good night's rest.

There is a scratching sound from the doorway. You get up and go to peer out of the window, but whatever is there leaps up on to the roof of the hut and starts scrabbling around amid the thatching. Opening your mouth to shout – intending to scare off whatever mischievous animal is doing this – you are startled by an abrupt cacophony of shrieks, insane laughs and gibbering cries which resounds from all around the hut. It is a noise to drown out the suffering souls of Hades, and it makes your blood run cold despite the oppressive heat of the night.

Nothing is visible out in the pitch darkness, and you dare not go outside to see what is causing these ghastly sounds. You creep back to your bed on trembling legs, scared half witless. At last, with hands pressed to your ears, you fall into a troubled slumber brought on by sheer exhaustion.

You wake a few hours later. It is still dark, but the noise has stopped. You can hear nothing now, in fact – not even the chirruping of insects. Perhaps the whole unsettling experience was no more than a dream.

The night is still sweltering hot. You run your

tongue across parched lips. You are extremely thirsty.

If you earlier filled your Lucky Bottle with water, turn to **3**

If you did not fill the bottle, or if you do not have it, turn to **138**

127

The ground squelches underfoot and mist hangs like mouldered lace between the boles of the trees. An eerie sense of unease settles over you, and you find yourself repeatedly glancing over your shoulder as you trudge on through the marsh.

It is while looking back in this way that you run smack into what you take to be a tree. Then you feel it move . . .

Turning, you find yourself confronted by a monstrous serpent with nine gloom-eyed heads. Nine thin tongues flicker on lipless maws. Nine sinister hisses echo off into the mist.

HYDRA: COMBAT 2 BODY 7

Each time the hydra loses a BODY point, it *gains* one point of COMBAT (up to a maximum COMBAT score of 6). For some reason this does not apply in the case of wounds inflicted on it using FIRE OF WRATH or BALL OF FLAME. However, if you don't have any Fire magic, it might be better to flee.

If you decide to flee, turn to **18**

If you fight on and win, turn to **5**

If you fight but fail, your last sight is of nine sinister tongues shooting towards you, and nine mouths yawning wide in anticipation of a grisly feast . . .

128

Deciding to fill your Lucky Bottle from the river, you scramble down the bank and stoop beside the clear water. Almost immediately you jump up again – surely that was a cry for help you heard? It came from upstream, just around the bend in the river.

If you decide to investigate, turn to **139**

If you simply fill your Lucky Bottle (it will still count as only one encumbrance item) and then go on your way, turn to **115**

129

Holding the loathsome spiny thing by the tail, you fling it into the fire and watch it crackle and shrivel like a burning pine-cone. You note that spriggans burn with a pale green flame, producing an odour like mingled honeysuckle and charred hair. The residue resembles wax, and you can keep some of this if you wish (it counts as one item of encumbrance). Perhaps these details will interest your master.

The rest of the night passes without incident. In the morning you rake over the ashes of the fire, gather your things, and prepare to set out.

Turn to **141**

130

Despite your frenzied squirming, you are pulled relentlessly through the hole in the floor. Darkness and a foul goatish stench surround you. Coarse fingers grip you tightly.

Above, the floorboard slides back into position, blocking off the last chink of light. Your screams go unheeded.

There is a cruel laugh. It is the last thing you hear in this life.

131

Which spell will you try:

TEMPEST?	Turn to **8**
SLEEP?	Turn to **21**

If you have neither of these, or do not think they will work, you had better back out before it is too late and continue on your way (turn to **107**)

132

At last the plains come to an end, rising into barren dusty hills. You wend your way on, following the course of a dry gully, until you see the towers of a grim citadel ahead. A pennant flies from the topmost turret: a grey flag on which seven black stars are visible.

The Citadel of the Seven Statues. Somewhere in that forbidding keep, your master lies imprisoned.

Experiencing renewed vigour now that you are within sight of your goal, you march up towards the citadel. There is a growing knot of icy fury in your heart. You will deal harshly with whoever has captured your master and forced you on this arduous quest.

Suddenly an arrow whispers through the air. Just missing you, it clatters off a nearby rock. Dropping to a crouch, you scan the walls until you see a flurry of movement behind a narrow window to one side of the gatehouse. An archer stands there, already nocking a second shaft on to his bow, ready to snipe at you as you approach.

If you want to run straight for the gate, turn to **24**

If you prefer to advance in a zigzagging rush, turn to **34**

If you decide to cast a spell first, turn to **47**

133

You start to climb.

Try to roll equal to or less than your SPEED score on one dice. (If you have some strands of cobweb-silk, these will help in the ascent: you can add one point to your SPEED *for this roll only*.)

If you succeed in the roll, turn to **10**

If you fail, turn to **22**

134

A stormcloud fills the shaft; turbulent winds buffet the floating heads. They stare up at you with eyes full

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A stormcloud fills the shaft; turbulent winds buffet the floating heads. They stare up at you with eyes full

of luminous hatred, but are powerless to ascend and attack you until the tempest dissipates. By that time, you intend to have put at least one door between you and them.

Turn to **110**

135

'I have new boots, my lord,' you improvise hurriedly. 'No doubt the thick soles account for an extra few inches.'

The seventh statue follows you for another few steps before digging an adamantine finger into your ribs. 'And you seem rather scrawnier.'

'I have been too busy in my lords' service to take the time to eat,' you explain.

When you have almost got him into his seat, he rests his hand solidly across your shoulders and says: 'And only yesterday you were a hunchback . . .'

You know when to cut your losses and run. Snatching the key-ring from the statue (remember to note it on your Character Sheet once you're safe) you make a dash for the stairs.

Roll one dice, trying to score equal to or less than your SPEED.

If you succeed, you race up the spiral staircase, which is too narrow for the living statues to pursue you; turn to **11**

If you fail, you are seized before you can get away; turn to **92**

136

The name Theodosius seems to mean nothing to them. 'But yonder is the library,' says one man as he hears your query. He points to a thin high building with cramped windows.

'There are many tomes and documents,' another man tells you. 'You may find something there pertaining to your quest.'

The icy mist draws a cough from your lungs. A shudder runs through your frame. The atmosphere of this place is decidedly unhealthy, and you must lose one BODY point.

If you go to the library, turn to **13**

If you decide to leave now and resume your journey, turn to **147**

137

The spell causes a curtain of mist to rise from the roiling vapours filling the lightless gulf beneath you. It shields you from sight as you fly on, but the ploy is of no avail against your bat-like opponent. Giving vent to a series of shrill screeches, it flexes its huge ears and follows your progress as though guided by echoes. Now it is too late to avoid combat – *and* you have wasted a spell that might have been useful later.

Turn to **77**

138

Gingerly – since you are still troubled by thoughts of the uncanny sound you heard before – you creep out

to the water trough. Cupping your hands, you lift the water to your lips and drink deeply.

Someone taps you on the shoulder.

'Please wait your turn,' you admonish him sleepily. 'I'm not finished yet.'

A horrible white face looms over your shoulder, reflected in the black water. Then others appear, and you realize they are all around you.

'Oh yes, you are,' replies a tomb-cold voice.

139

Around the bend in the river, you see a waterfall. In front of it, a woman is standing knee-deep in the water and struggling with a bizarre creature. It is an unnatural monster of spume and river-reeds, powerful arms muscled like giant salmon. You get a glimpse of silvery fins and a dull piscine gaze. A tongue in the form of an eel licks the wet pebbles that are its teeth.

The woman staggers back and falls with a splash. The creature is upon her before she can recover, trying to pin her and force her under the water. She fights back ferociously, but you see that she is unarmed and is weakening under its onslaught.

You do not need to wait for a lesson in chivalry. Brandishing your dagger, you give a lusty roar and charge forward to do battle with the monster. But evidently it has no taste for a fair fight. Fixing you with its gimlet eyes, it retreats, dropping away into the river like a collapsing wave.

You help the woman to her feet. Once she has got her breath back, she says: 'May the gods bless you for your intervention! It was foolish of me to bathe here, so close to the waterfall, since I have been warned often enough about the river-elemental.'

It is all you can do to hear her over the constant roar of the waterfall. 'That's said to be the sound of the elemental's rage,' she remarks when she sees you cup your hand to your ears. 'In which case he'll be doubly loud tonight, having been thwarted.'

If you ask if she'll put you up for the night, turn to **42**

If you prefer to take your leave of her and find shelter elsewhere, turn to **115**

140

You make your way up out of the boggy lowland bordering the lake, and by late afternoon you are walking on pleasant wind-blown downs. Ahead, as dusk draws over the landscape, lies a rolling vista of copses and grassy knolls.

Spying a cottage, you make your way nearer in the hope of finding shelter for the night. However, your calls of greeting are unanswered, and so it seems the place is deserted.

You push the door open. Evidently there is no-one at home, but the cottage shows signs of having been lived in quite recently. Why should the owner have left? However no danger is visible so you decide to take the liberty of making up a bed for yourself

beside the fire. In the absence of the owner, you also help yourself to some bread and butter from the larder. After supper you feel warmed and content, and can restore one BODY point if currently wounded.

Then you settle down for the night.

Try to roll your MIND score or less on one dice.

If you succeed, turn to **93**

If you fail, turn to **105**

141

It is a blustery day, but free of rain. You find the fresh wind to be bracing rather than unpleasant, and soon fall into a strong stride. The miles roll by. Before long you are heading out across sweeping plains. There are no trees, and the wind flattens the long dry grass. The occasional granite tor is the only feature in this desolate flat landscape.

Finally you come in sight of a crag, at the top of which squats a building of stone walls and high black-painted gables. A steep path leads up towards it.

If you go up to investigate the building, turn to **19**

If you press on across the plains, turn to **6**

142

You stride rapidly across the courtyard, resisting the urge to look back over your shoulder. Your only wish now is to be away from this dire place as quickly as possible.

You come to a halt beside the gates. Still fastened by the stout padlock, they bar your exit from the

Academy. You must resort to magic if you are ever to leave.

If you use GENIE to unlock the gates, turn to **20**

If you use PASS THROUGH ROCK to go straight through the courtyard wall, turn to **32**

If you have neither of these spells, you now notice the skulls scattered against the walls of the courtyard – the mortal remains of previous visitors to the Academy. Like them, you are doomed to remain a prisoner here forevermore.

143

The harpist's ferret-like face contorts in fury as he sees you rushing through the throng towards him. He bends over his harp with redoubled energy, thin fingers plucking frantically at the strings, producing musical notes to make your senses reel.

Roll one dice.

If you roll less than or equal to your MIND score, turn to **33**

If you roll more, turn to **46**

144

You are getting your things together in preparation for another day's journeying when the nomad chieftain comes to you.

'I wish to thank you again for your help last night,' he says. 'We are but poor people, so there is little I can give you to repay you for your trouble.'

You raise a hand. 'Think nothing of it.'

'It is a matter of honour that we give you something,' he insists. 'Therefore I have brought you this small quantity of a liquid called *aqua regia*, or "royal water". It was sold to us by a trader, and is an acid with the power to dissolve gold. I doubt we would ever find someone interested in buying it; but it may be useful to a scholar like yourself, who no doubt enjoys tinkering among the flasks and alembics of a laboratory.'

You transfer the *aqua regia* to the Lucky Bottle. (Together, liquid and bottle still count as only one item for encumbrance purposes.)

After thanking the chieftain, you turn to the east and head off on your way.

Turn to **59**

145

You advance cautiously across the cobbled courtyard towards the central donjon of the citadel: a square building of drear grey stone, more closely resembling the colossal mausoleum of a king than a castle's inner tower.

You pass through an archway into an empty vestibule. There is a huge door directly in front of you, emblazoned with the same armorial insignia that you saw on the pennant: seven black stars on a grey field. The emblem of the enigmatic Seven Statues – whoever, or whatever, they might be.

Your gaze travels around the vestibule, checking for possible avenues of attack. You see only a well in

the floor, whose shaft probably leads to the citadel's crypts or storerooms.

If you want to go over and look down the well, turn to **61**

If you cross straight to the door, turn to **74**

146

The spell augments your agility with a burst of superhuman speed. Borne by a magical gale, you flit across to the other side of the vestibule and are opening the door before the silent heads are even halfway up the well-shaft.

Turn to **110**

147

You take the carpet up into the sky. The night-mist clings to you in thin tendrils, falling back slowly as you emerge from it, so that it is like surfacing from an ethereal sea.

A racking cough tears at your lungs as you proceed. Lose one BODY point for your sojourn in the unhealthy atmosphere of the lost city – and be thankful you didn't stay longer.

Turn to **39**

148

You unfasten the chains. Rubbing the circulation back into his wrists, Theodosius gets to his feet. 'You've done rather well,' he says with a smile. 'Well enough, I think, to deserve this.' He takes a

document from his belt and hands it to you. Drawing himself up to his full majesty, he begins to mutter an incantation. A teleportation spell.

'Master,' you say. 'Wait for me . . .'

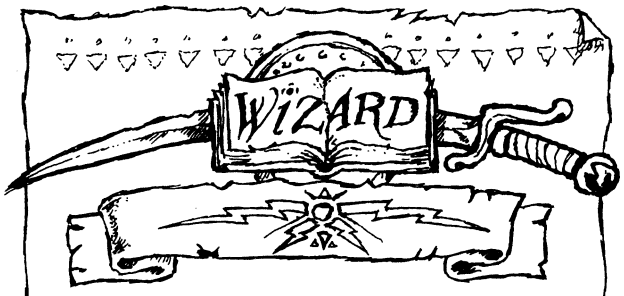
He waves his hand in dismissal. 'Surely you know this particular teleportation spell will only take one person. You'll have to find your way home by some other means. An enterprising young wizard like you shouldn't have any difficulty in managing a simple thing like that. You got here, after all, didn't you? Just apply a bit of the same ingenuity to getting home.'

Before you can raise any further protest, Theodosius has uttered the spell that will take him back to his manse in the blink of an eye. He shimmers like a mirage and evaporates away into thin air.

As you ponder on possible ways to return home, you remember the document he gave you. You unroll it and discover that it is your diploma, certifying you as a master of wizardry. Ever since you began your study of magic, you have looked forward to the day you would receive this diploma.

You roll up the diploma and tuck it into your belt, then square your shoulders and set off back the way you came. As you walk, a sudden thought makes you smile:

Teleportation spells are for *wimps*.



DIPLOMA OF WIZARDRY

On this day the bearer of this
certificate was deeemed worthy
of the title

Adeptus Magicus

Having demonstrated exceptional
levels of wisdom, valour, cunning and
sorcerous prowess.

Henceforth the bearer is empowered to
use spells of all *Four* of the elemental
types: Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

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Listen to my words and heed them well, usurper. Your place is among the dead...

Strange things are afoot on the sorcerous island of Truillon. Wet floorboards and shadowy spectres suggest that the drowned Archimage has returned from the dead. Has he come to test the worthiness of his successor, or is it revenge that has called him back from his watery grave? Armed with only a strong heart and a handful of spells, the apprentice Osric must find the answers – otherwise his master is surely doomed...

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